Submission

To

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications

INQUIRY INTO CYBER CRIME

By

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS

(ACSSO)

8 July 2009

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Introduction: About ACSSO

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) was established in 1946 as the national peak body representing the interests of the families and school communities of the some 2.2 million students who attend Australia's 12,000 public schools, preschools and kindergartens, and also deals with issues affecting their access to appropriate high quality tertiary education.

ACSSO provides research-based input to the Australian Government and its agencies and operations on proposed policies and actions in the education area, plus a range of information and support services to State and Territory affiliate organisations and their membership networks across the country. Our functions are increasingly diverse and extensive, and include in particular to:

o   conduct, commission and publish research on educational issues
o   lead and facilitate public debate and discussion to establish the strategic directions and priorities for education
o   provide an interactive information service to government and to schools and their communities
o   ensure that community needs and priorities are reflected in education decision making processes
o   develop and manage a range of initiatives and community projects to improve the effective involvement of parents and families in student learning and development.

ACSSO maintains close and positive liaison linkages with our colleagues of the Australian Parents Council (APC), and increasingly undertakes the development, design and conduct of action research and community projects in partnership with APC, in the interests of the effective learning and personal development of all young Australians from their earliest years, through the compulsory years of schooling, tertiary study and their transition into the workforce.

Our work reflects the findings of our and others' research here in Australia – confirmed by more extensive research around the world over the past twenty years in particular, that young people's learning , health and positive personal development are enhanced when parents, schools and their wider community work together in positive, sustainable partnerships.

On behalf of those millions of parents and families and their children, we are deeply concerned *about the ways in which the capacity and opportunities for misuse of current and developing technology and the related media that increasingly are central and all-pervasive to the learning and social development and interconnection of young people can militate against and undermine their safety, security, well-being and render them vulnerable and at both immediate risk and extended risk of ongoing traumatic consequences in their future lives:*

- *from increased exposure to cyber-bullying, both as an extension of older forms of violence and abuse – and in new, more malignant and psychologically damaging ways;*
- *from various forms of "stalking" through the widespread use of social networking sites;*
- *from associated heightened risks of being the target of "sexual grooming" and of the extension of that risk to actual sexual attack and related forms of violence and assault*

Well-being and personal development the basis for learning and positive outcomes

The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in 21st Century (1999) establishes the vital importance of building positive personal qualities and student safety and well-being as essential underpinnings of effective learning and the development of future citizens contributing to a cohesive and socially inclusive society:

Schooling provides a foundation for young Australians' intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development. By providing a supportive and nurturing environment, schooling contributes to the development of students' sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future.

Governments set the public policies that foster the pursuit of excellence, enable a diverse range of educational choices and aspirations, safeguard the entitlement of all young people to high quality schooling, promote the economic use of public resources, and uphold the contribution of schooling to a socially cohesive and culturally rich society. (http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/nationalgoals/natgoals.htm)

These aspects are also endorsed as fundamental elements in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008):

As a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society— a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia's Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation's history, present and future.

In the 21st century Australia's capacity to provide a high quality of life for all will depend on the ability to compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation. Education equips young people with the knowledge, understanding, skills and values to take advantage of opportunity and to face the challenges of this era with confidence.

Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion. Schools share this responsibility with students, parents, carers, families, the community, business and other education and training providers.

Being subject to any of – or even, in a worst-case scenario - all of these aspects of "cyber-danger" is of course highly detrimental to the positive personal development, sense of identity, positive outlook or sense of hope for the future of any young person – from whatever background , in any context. It is totally destructive of the whole purpose of schooling as described in the foundation documents quoted above, and the building of a socially inclusive and cohesive society.

It is also deeply disruptive for families affected by such incidents, and their wider community.

The increasing awareness by families of the prevalence of these behaviours and risks for young people deeply affects all parents and makes all families apprehensive for their young people – and feeling confused and helpless about the possible ways in which they can support their children and help them navigate these risks successfully.

These risks pose new and disturbing challenges for teachers and principals – they are totally disruptive to the purpose, ethos and effective operation of a school and counterproductive to its purposes of building and maintaining a safe, secure and inclusive learning community where young people can achieve their position and build a sense of confidence and purpose for their current progress and future lives.

We know too that the psychological damage suffered by victims – (not to mention the collateral damage suffered by their family, and their wider school community.

(We must be aware also that bullies themselves run the real risk of perpetuating and building on such threatening and anti-social behaviours in ways which may increasingly make it difficult for

them to lead productive fulfilling lives and build positive relationships with others. They too may extend their negative behaviours in ways that contribute to increasingly risky behaviours that in turn may frustrate their potential, social contribution and leading a fulfilled life – and they too may become costs upon the social security, welfare and criminal justice systems in later life – as demonstrated by some of the international research.)

Reports in the media of the impact of these situations on young people demonstrates the extent to which this can directly and indirectly affect not only their physical health and well-being, but also and especially their social, emotional and mental well-being – contributing certainly to feelings of guilt, anger, grief and depression to substance abuse of both licit and illicit substances; and also to suicidal ideation and, it is suggested in recent articles (see Attachment) of actual attempted or successful suicides.

Certainly a number of particularly horrific cases have been brought to our attention, involving extensive and ongoing needs for medical interventions and psychological and/or psychiatric help – and not always just for the direct victims, but also affected parents or siblings.

This highlights the direct and indirect social costs. Where the effects of this sort of victimisation operate to prevent a young person achieving their full potential and operating as a fully contributing member of an inclusive society, there is a real opportunity cost for the community and the future in addition to the cost to that young person.

Similarly, the potential direct on-costs include the requirements for support and welfare services, medical interventions, social security – and, as we will touch on below, the justice systems.

There are obvious negative implications for education systems – the additional preventive measures to which schools must divert scarce professional staff and support resources, for example, the time spent in following up and dealing with alleged or evident cases of cyber bullying or other improper conduct involving misuse of school equipment in some cases – and misuse of the ambient technologies of mobile phones, Facebook, Utube, email systems to harass or threaten out of school hours etc – impacting upon the school's duty of care in a variety of ways.

In the same way, the potential costs to the education systems at local or overall levels create a significant and growing area of risk in relation to this duty of care and allegations of contributory negligence. The media increasingly reports on cases where students and their families are taking civil legal proceedings alleging such breaches of duty of care – recently in NSW the courts awarded some half-million dollars to a former student, after protracted and costly legal proceedings, in respect of breach of duty of care in relation to years of substantiated bullying and harassment the student had endured.

It is of course even worse and infinitely more reprehensible where cases come before the courts and the media where teaching staff themselves have been misusing technology to develop improperly-motivated relationships with vulnerable young students who look to them for mentoring and support.

This sort of behaviour by teachers, by other adults known to or unkown to the students, or by other students, goes beyond the civil legal proceedings and into the criminal arena – as also do threats of physical violence to the student or other members of their family.

A variety of such issues are illustrated in the array of media stories taken from the ACSSO weekly newsletter "Australian Education Digest" throughout 2009 in which we have sought to highlight and publicise the increasing incidence of such cases, and the widening variety of ways in which the range of available and interlinking technologies opens up additional opportunities for its misuse in victimising, harassing, belittling, slandering, threatening – through to stalking and sexually grooming – young and vulnerable people and across a widening range of age levels.

Our purpose in this is to make school communities, families and young people themselves more aware of the range of risks – including available and emerging research from sources in Australia and overseas which more analytically explore the nature of such negative activities and the ways in which parents, families, schools and young people can be on their guard and try to build resilience and coping strategies should such instances become apparent in their circle or community.

The increasing levels of coverage in the media raise the question as to whether these behaviours are becoming more prevalent and more frequent and more extensively pervasive across schools and communities – or whether there is simply a greater focus and awareness that is leading to better reporting of the numbers of such instances.

Certainly there is increasing coverage – not only in the Australian media, but at a similarly increasing level in the media of other countries – and it would seem the experience in the UK and the USA in particular is directly comparable.

In those other countries, as in Australia, the increased level of reportage of such instances seems to be in parallel with increasing levels of awareness and reportage of bad behaviour demonstrated by students generally – this also has been the subject of some research and media comment in other parts of the world – most recently and comprehensively in a Report by the OECD which – among other things – looked at the increasing concern both about general bad behaviours and also about the increasingly cyber-linked nature of bullying and associated risks for young people.

In the public discussion and discourse around the issues we have touched on in this brief outline, we have unfortunately been aware of an ongoing attitude of denial in the community – a negative position which takes the approach that bullying in all its forms is simply – and has always been – an essential part of the way things are and an inescapable element of growing up and an unavoidable aspect of a young person's journey through life.

We are even aware, from cases we have dealt with, of attitudes among parents and teachers that suggest that both the affected families and their affected young people should "just get over it" – in some cases (and this was expressed in a recent article by a teacher published in the Canberra Times, and is certainly held by far too many in the community – that it is partly or significantly the fault of the victims themselves – they should toughen up - try to fit in better – stop provoking that sort of behaviour – change their ways. Or just bully back. There seems to be a residual feeling that both courses are "character building"…. Like head lice, a perennial element of the formative education process.

We do not believe any of these assertions for a moment. We do not believe that any child or their families should have to put up either with these negative behaviours or to endure their potential longer term consequences. We believe that strong coordinated opposive action must be taken at all levels of the community and bringing all relevant potential forms of remediation and challenge to bear on any such behaviours with the objective of making them impossible to sustain and progressively of making them totally unacceptable to all members of the community and all levels of community servicing and support, and thus of making them untenable and progressively stamping them out.

 In this regard, having briefly outlined our perceptions and concerns, we would then seek to direct the Committee's attention to a number of major recent research reports, some of which have only just been published.

These are fully detailed in the References section which follows, with online links to each of these important research publications and their extremely significant findings and recommendations.

In addition to these we are also aware of two other major review which have just been commenced.

The first of these is the commissioning by the **Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations of a major national review of the Safe Schools Framework**, which was endorsed by all Ministers of Education and established and national guidelines for each and every school and its community in 2003. The scope of this review includes taking into account all recent work to illustrate and analyse the effects of cyber-bullying and the various downside aspects of the misuse of current and emerging technologies in the ways we have discussed above.   However, because of the scope of this major initiative, its final Report and Recommendations will not be available until the latter part of 2010.

Even more recently, the Shadow Minister for Education, Hon Christopher Pyne MP, has announced an intended joint initiative of State and Federal Shadow Ministers to independently consider the issues around cyber-bullying and the victimising misuse of technology, within the wider context of ensuring a safe and supportive school community, in response to the continued publicity of issues such as those set out in the Attachment to this Submission. This again will take considerable lead times and the final outcomes are unclear at this point.

In the immediate term, we would particularly direct the attention of the Committee to the Recommendations set out in the report "Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study" – (which is referenced in the following section of this Submission.)- as follows:-

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 and provide the necessary resources to support schools to minimise this bullying through their policy and practice.

We take this opportunity to record the strong support of ACSSO for these Recommendations and commend them to the Committee.

Rupert Macgregor

Executive Director

8 July 2009

Publications referred to in this Submission with online access references:

"Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study" Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University (May 2009). Accessed at:
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/research.aspx

"Behind the Scenes: insights into the human dimension of covert bullying" Dr. Barbara Spears et al, Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (December 2008). Accessed at:
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/research.aspx

"**Click and Connect: young Australians' use of online social media – qualitative research report**", Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA) (July 2009). Accessed at:
http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/aba/about/recruitment/click_and_connect-01_qualitative_report.pdf

"**Click and Connect: young Australians' use of online social media – quantitative research report**", Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA) (July 2009). Accessed at: http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/aba/about/recruitment/click_and_connect-02_quantitative_report.pdf

"Online child grooming: a literature review on the misuse of social networking sites for grooming children for sexual offenses" Kim-Kwang Raymond Choo, AIC Reports 103, Australian Institute of Criminology (July 2009) accessed at: http://apo.org.au/research/online-child-grooming-literature-review-misuse-social-networking-sites-grooming-children-se

Bullying out of control in middle years of school

Bruce McDougall and Tanya Chilcott

BULLYING is out of control in schools as one in four children from Years 4 to 9 claim they are regularly attacked.

The Courier-Mail can reveal that bullying peaks in the final years of primary school where 32 per cent of students are targeted.

Results from Australia's largest study of school bullying shows Year 8 students are major victims, with almost one in three citing taunts and attacks.

The research, commissioned by the Federal Government and obtained by *The Courier-Mail*, shows Queensland has among the highest levels of bullying in the country - well above the national average in Years 7, 8 and 9 and the highest rate for Year 9.

More than one-third of Year 8 students in Queensland indicated they were being bullied.

Meanwhile, Year 9 students in Queensland were more likely to take part in cyber bullying than most of their counterparts nationwide.

Only Northern Territory students were worse.

Many of the 7000 children from 124 schools surveyed across Australia said they had lost faith in the ability of teachers to protect them.

The report recommends an overhaul of the way in which schools handle the issue of bullying.

Researchers found almost half of all children in Year 9 are both bullied and bullying others.

But researchers also found that the harder schools crack down on physical attacks, the greater the increase in covert bullying, including psychological taunts and reputation-shredding.

The role of children who film fights, such as the recent recording of an Elanora State High School girl allegedly being attacked, is coming under increasing scrutiny for contributing to victims' torment.

Two national reports on bullying, compiled by Edith Cowan University in Western Australia and the University of South Australia, have been sent to the Rudd Government.

Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard said research showed schools needed more guidance to combat bullying which had become a "serious issue for many young people".

"I think these reports are spot-on when they describe bullying and particularly cyber bullying as cruel, ostracising and intimidating," Ms Gillard said.

The findings show:

Two in five students feel things stay the same or get worse after telling an adult.

64 per cent of bullied children seek help from friends rather than parents.

Students from public schools are more likely to indicate they are being bullied.

Cyber bullying is used more by students from non-government schools.

More than half of all students believe it is worse to hit another student than send a nasty electronic message.

Bullying victims show social withdrawal, nervousness, depression and declines in academic performance.

The studies show most covert bullying occurs during breaks at school and in the classroom.

Teasing is the most prevalent behaviour.

Research shows covert bullying is likely to cause the greatest suffering for both sexes and is more likely to go unnoticed by teachers.

Covert bullying in Australia is expected to follow international trends and become "more prevalent and insidious" due to increasing use of technology.

Push to help gay pupils with new anti-homophobia policy

Article from: **Herald Sun**

John Masanauskas

TEACHERS who ignore abuse of gay students could face legal action.

Teachers are being urged to stamp out negative comments such as "that's so gay" in a new policy to rid schools of homophobia.

Schools are being encouraged to display information and phone numbers on notice boards relevant to gay pupils.

They are also being asked to strategically place books about homosexuality to make gay students feel welcome.

A new state Education Department policy paper, "Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools", says comprehensive action is needed to protect vulnerable gay students.

The paper, endorsed by Education Minister Bronwyn Pike, says about 10 per cent of students have "same-sex attraction" feelings and most suffer verbal or physical abuse.

Teachers who ignored homophobic abuse could face action under state equal opportunity laws for "authorising or assisting discrimination", the policy says.

Associate Professor Anne Mitchell, a La Trobe University gay and lesbian health expert whose research helped formulate the policy, said yesterday that posters or books giving information on homosexuality in a counselling area would make gay students feel safer.

Ms Mitchell said some teachers were scared of being labelled gay if they challenged homophobia and others needed a push to move ahead with the times.

"Some people have strong religious beliefs or if they're older people who were brought up in the era when homosexuality was considered an illness or was illegal, then maybe those beliefs still sit there unchallenged," she said.

Australian Christian Lobby state director Rob Ward said while he strongly supported anti-bullying measures, there was no need to single out any minority group.

"This . . . approach seems to be bordering on promoting a lifestyle rather than discouraging bullying as such," he said.

Liberal education spokesman Martin Dixon said schools were being burdened with too many social campaigns.

"Teaching respect for minority groups should be done within the family and wider community," he said.

Ms Pike said: "The Liberal Party offers nothing to improve schooling in Victoria and by advocating for less student support Mr Dixon is helping do nothing but breed intolerance in schools.

"This is a critical component of how we can teach respect in schools and tackle bullying."

Victorian school bullying is out of control, national report says

Article from: **Herald Sun**

Bruce McDougall, John Masanauskas

BULLYING is surging out of control in Victoria's schools. Almost one in four children in years 4-9 say they are regular targets of bullies.

Bullying peaks in primary school, in year 5, but continues well into high school, according to Australia's largest study of the problem.

The study reports that 22 per cent of year 9 students say they are victims.

Researchers are recommending schools overhaul their whole approach to the problem, a major part of which is now cyber-bullying.

A Carrum Downs mother whose daughter has been bullied at two bayside primary schools said political leaders should take action.

Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard conceded bullying was a serious problem for many young people.

 Mum Lynda Beddoe, of Carrum Downs, said, "The attitude needs to change. I'm sick and tired of them sweeping it under the carpet."

The federally commissioned research, seen by the Herald Sun, reveals bullying is even worse in other states.

In Victoria, 23.2 per cent of year 4-9 students said they'd been bullied; nationally, it was almost 27 per cent. Slightly more boys than girls were bullied, and 8 per cent of students said they'd bullied others.

Of thousands of students from 124 schools:

TWO in five bullied students felt things were unchanged or worse after telling an adult.

TWO-thirds of victims went to friends rather than parents.

STUDENTS from public schools were more likely to claim bullying than students from non-government schools.

Covert bullying is expected to become "more prevalent and insidious", thanks to communications technology.

Ms Gillard said: "I think these reports are spot-on when they describe bullying, particularly cyber-bullying, as cruel, ostracising and intimidating.

"Most disturbingly, many said they didn't report cyber-bullying because they were scared their mobile or computer would be taken away."

[The State Government](#) said students were encouraged to show tolerance and respect and bullying wasn't tolerated.

Mum wants cyber thugs to pay

Article from: **Courier Mail**

Carly Crawford

THE mother of a US teen who committed suicide after a campaign of abuse by cyber bullies has appealed to Australian lawmakers to prosecute attackers.

Tina Meier, whose daughter Megan hanged herself in 2006, aged 13, said strict school rules and the threat of criminal action were the keys to keeping school bullies at bay.

"We have to put things in place so kids realise this is not a joke," Ms Meier said from Missouri. "I have had teenagers from Australia contact me telling me the horrible things they are going through from cyber bullies."

Ms Meier called for a three strikes system under which school cyber bullies were first warned, then suspended and finally expelled.

"Cyber bullies need to be treated as though they have been physically violent because the effect on the victim is the same," she said.

Megan Meier ended her life after she was befriended then ridiculed by a fictitious person who went by the name "Josh Evans" on a social networking site. The true identity of "Josh" was exposed as the mother of one of Megan's school friends.

Mum Lori Drew had suspected Megan of spreading rumours about her daughter, Sarah, who was also alleged to have posed as "Josh" but was not prosecuted.

In a landmark cyber bullying case, Ms Drew was convicted of illegally accessing a computer and faces up to three years jail. The case, which was nearly never prosecuted because of vague criminal cyber bullying laws in the US, sparked a wave of new cyber-specific legislation.

In Ms Meier's home state, bullies aged 17 and under can now be prosecuted and adults aged over 18 jailed for the crime.

"The law needs to be specific and refer to harassment, stalking, the internet, phones and any electronic services," Ms Meier said. "It needs to include children as well as adults because children need to be held accountable. And law enforcement needs to pursue them.

"Cyber bullying totally destroys lives – it's not just kids being kids."

National Coalition Against Bullying chairman and retired High Court judge Alistair Nicholson has called for tighter cyber bullying laws in Australia, saying existing rules did not properly protect victims.

Ms Meier said rigorous education programs were needed to combat bullying both during and after school hours.

Authorities powerless against online death threats

By Simon Lauder

Anonymous abusers are apparently getting away with obscene and violent bullying tactics against teenagers in Western Australia because they are doing the cyber bullying on a US-based website.

Despite spurious and nasty allegations and death threats, the teenagers have been advised to get new phone numbers and a lawyer.

The website in question purports to be a forum for people to complain about anyone.

It also seeks to make a point about internet censorship.

But for 18-year-old Majella Sheppard it is just a form of abuse and harassment.

"There was some threats in there and there's just been another one made recently saying that my family's going to die one by one," she said.

"I wasn't too happy about that when I read it.

"I took it to the police when it got so severe that they actually threatened to hang my son and the police told me that there's basically nothing that they could do about it because there was no names on there, so just pretty much try and get over it."

Peter Murfitt is the father of another teenager who is targeted on the site.

"They've called her a slut and a drug user and there's been threats to burn houses down, threats to kill," he said.

Mr Murfitt says if the site is not shut down there is a risk to the man who runs it.

"If you attack someone's kids enough and you're allowing it, then someone's going to do something about it aren't they?"

Authorities powerless

There have been calls for the police to take action against those behind the website.

But head of the Victoria Police E-crime squad, Inspector John Manley, says there is not much he can do.

"We haven't got an offence to investigate," he said.

Inspector Manley says Australian authorities are powerless to act because the site is based in the United States.

"It's not within our capacity to do that and it's not within the Australian Communication and Media Authority's capacity to do that," he said.

Inspector Manley says the best advice he can give those targeted is to get a new mobile number to avoid getting abusive text messages and to take legal action.

"One of the first things they've got to do is obviously, if they get a posting on the site that relates to them, [is] tell their parent or a guardian what's there and discuss it with them," he said.

"They will help the child bring it to police notice if necessary and then we can look at it on that basis.

"It might be something that relates to something at school and the school might be the appropriate arena to address it.

"It depends on what the posting is, but certainly seek the advice of an adult if you're a minor.

"If you're an adult and you feel you've been defamed but maybe you don't want to report it to the police, then go and see a lawyer and get advice there."

Executive director of the Cyberspace Law and Policy Centre at the University of New South Wales, David Vaile, says that is good advice.

"There are creative opportunities for not necessarily lawyers but even diligent prosecutors or investigators to explore possibilities," he said.

"So for instance, it sounds like there's been false allegations of abuse in many jurisdictions that may end up being an offence itself.

"There are also potential defamations that have occurred. Obviously it's harder to deal with in America and that's not a criminal matter, but there may also be potential other offences like cyber stalking.

"All of those may in fact be worth exploring."

Mr Vaile says online abuse is a difficult area for police to get involved in.

"To try and draw the line between what's OK and what is criminal is obviously a very difficult matter and it's something that obviously police are looking for much more serious offences to focus their resources on.

"They're going to be reluctant to spend too much time on."

One person targeted by the website has already taken action.

Queensland ALP president Andrew Dettmer is now suing the website's designer for defamation.

The Hon Julia Gillard MP

Minister for Education. Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Minister for Social Inclusion
Deputy Prime Minister

1 June, 2009

Media release

Bullying in our schools under reported and cyber bullying on the rise

Research released today by the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard shows the prevalence and impact of covert bullying in Australian schools is under-reported and there has been a concerning increase in cyber-bullying.

The Rudd Government takes bullying and violence very seriously and believes student wellbeing and safety are essential for academic and social development.

The reports, the *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study* and *Behind the Scenes: Insights into the Human Dimension of Covert Bullying*, provide valuable insights into the changing nature of bullying.

This research shows that with the emergence of new technologies, cyber bullying after school has become a serious issue for many young people.

The research, which involved 7000 young people from 124 schools around the nation, found bullying and particularly cyber bullying to be cruel, torturous, ostracising and intimidating.

Most disturbingly, many of these young people said they did not report incidents of cyber bullying because they were scared their mobile phone or computer would be taken away from them.

The need to incorporate guidance for schools to respond to cyber bullying, other forms of covert bullying and aggression has been identified with the help of these two studies.

Working in partnership with students, parents and schools the Rudd Government is committed to generating better outcomes for all students in a safe school environment free from any form of bullying or harassment.

The Rudd Government believes there is a real need for parents and teachers to establish effective relationships to ensure a seamless transition from school to home in the hope of eliminating young people's anxiety about being bullied in either setting.

The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, has also recently announced a new Youth Advisory Group made up of 305 young Australians to advise Government on online issues such as cyber-bullying.

The group is part of the Rudd Government's $125.8 million cyber-safety plan.

The Rudd Government also funds a range of initiatives to promote a positive whole-school culture that focuses on the academic needs of students, as well as their social and emotional learning.

These initiatives include promoting safe school initiatives to address bullying and violence in schools and boosting parental engagement in education through the Family School Partnerships Framework.

Both reports recommend a review of the 2003 National Safe Schools Framework.

The Australian Government has already commissioned Erebus International to undertake the review of the Framework which is due for completion in mid-2010.

As part of the review process, school leaders, teachers, families and appropriate stakeholders will be consulted. The review is expected to be completed by the end of May 2010.

The *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study* conducted by Edith Cowan University report found that covert bullying has the potential to result in more severe psychological, social and mental health problems than overt bullying and is more difficult for schools and parents to detect.

- Covert bullying appears to be under-reported as teachers and parents are more likely to intervene on physical or overt bullying.
- One in six students reported being bullied in covert ways such as teasing, exclusion from groups and bullying through cyber-space.
  Seventy per cent of staff surveyed reported observing overt and covert bullying in the survey period.
- Covert bulling was slightly more prevalent among girls. 18 per cent girls compared with 15 per cent boys.
- Cyber bullying was more prevalent among secondary school students. Up to 20 per cent of Year 9 students had experienced or participated in this behaviour.
- The percentage of students who had been bullied and who bullied others in covert ways increased from 21 per cent in Year 4 to 47 per cent in Year 9.

Established as part of the *Behind the Scenes: Insights into the Human Dimension of Covert Bullying* study, www.cyberbullyingstories.org.au is a website that presents the voices of students, parents, teachers and school staff with a view to informing, supporting and assisting school communities' understanding of covert and cyber bullying.

Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study and *Behind the Scenes: Insights into the Human Dimension of Covert Bullying* are available at:

http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/research.aspx

Media Contact:

Is cyber-bullying a crime?

Nick Abrahams with Victoria Dunn

Cyber-bullying is back in the spotlight. Earlier this month the federal government announced it had established a Youth Advisory Group, consisting of young Australians, to advise it on cyber-bullying and other online issues.

Within a week came the report that two year 9 students had been forced to leave a Sydney girls' school for cyber-bullying. As a result, I have been asked a number of times - shouldn't there be laws to stop this?

The answer is that there are some laws which cover the most aggressive forms of cyber-bullying but, unless you want to start filling jails with 15-year-olds, criminal sanctions are not the answer.

Bullying has been around for a long time. Recently, many schools have really focused on the issue and there has been some success in reducing the incidence of traditional school yard bullying. However, the internet is the bully's new school yard. Studies have shown that cyber-bullying is widespread, with at least one in three teenagers the victim of cyber-bullying.

Cyber-bullying presents new challenges to young people, their parents and society. Cyber-bullying is different to traditional bullying in a number of key respects:

1. Anonymity: The impression of anonymity in the online world leads young people to feel less accountable for their actions and provides a false bravado to would-be bullies. In fact, a recent study has shown that, of bullies surveyed, 70 per cent had engaged only in cyber-bullying.

2. Geography: Rather than being limited to the school-yard, cyber-bullying operates wherever a young person uses the internet or a mobile phone. There are few areas of a young person's life which cyber-bullying cannot penetrate.

3. Impact: The internet provides a means to make bullying comments available to a wider audience than ever before. Through social networking sites, comments can be viewed by potentially thousands of people. The impact of and embarrassment caused by these statements is therefore magnified.

4. Permanence: Verbal comments are fleeting. Online they stay around, potentially forever.

Where cyber-bullying is serious, it may be appropriate for the law to step in to impose penalties on bullies.

In cases where bullying involves a threat to kill or seriously injure a person, state-based criminal legislation could be used to lay criminal charges against bullies. However, where bullying does not include such threats, but is more in the realm of emotional cruelty, legal protection offered to victims is piecemeal.

Under the NSW Crimes Act it is a criminal offence to harass or intimidate a school student while the student is at school. This offence can be applied to traditional off-line bullying, but has its limits as it applies only to activities done at school.

As cyber-bullying can occur exclusively outside the school yard, it is quite possible that cyber-bullying would not be caught by this provision.

The Commonwealth Criminal Code sets out an offence of using a carriage service (such as a mobile phone service or the internet) in a way that is menacing, harassing or offensive. The maximum penalty for committing the offence is 3 years imprisonment.

While it has the potential to be used in cases of cyber-bullying, to date charges under this section of the Code have been brought only in relation to harassing phone calls.

Some state governments have specifically expanded the scope of the off-line harassment laws to cover online activities.

In Victoria, for example, the stalking provisions of the Crimes Act could extend to catch cyber-bullies who post information about a victim on the internet, intending the post to cause mental harm to the victim, or to cause the victim to fear for his or her safety.

However, even where specific legislation designed to apply to such online activities exists it has been of little effect, with no cases of successful prosecution for cyber-bullying in Australia.

In the absence of specific and effective laws dealing with cyber-bullying, victims must rely on laws largely designed to apply in the off-line world and, in many cases, developed before the advent of the internet.

Such laws include defamation law (which may offer some redress to victims about whom false statements have been published online) and laws preventing harassment of individuals on the basis of race, region and sexual orientation.

This piecemeal legal regime does not offer a comprehensive response to the increasing problem of cyber-bullying - nor should it.

Given the subjectivity of bullying, and the young age of many cyber-bullies, the traditional legal approach of deterring potential offenders by threatening criminal sanctions is not appropriate, except in the most serious cases.

There are those that propose that there should be laws requiring Internet Service Providers to remove bullying-related material from websites. While I am sympathetic to why people would want this, it is very difficult to create a workable solution.

How is the ISP to judge what is bullying content and what is not?

It is so subjective and places a heavy burden on ISPs. This issue of take down will become more acute in the future as more people seek to change their digital footprint - not just because of bullying material but perhaps because the content might be defamatory, or just something they wish a friend didn't put up on the internet when everyone was 18 or even something they themselves wish they did not put up on the internet when they were 18.

Currently, the most effective weapons for combating cyber-bullying are education programs and a commitment by schools to implement and enforce policies. Such education programs should include:

:: continuing education of teachers and schools about changes in technology and the potential for technology to be used by cyber-bullies;

:: educating kids about cyber-bullying - why not to do it and how to deal with it; and

:: educating parents about technology so they can understand what their kids are doing online and talk to them about it.

Bullying happens, but it should not be accepted as inevitable. Much has been done by schools and parents in recent years to raise awareness of and to reduce off-line bullying. This has been achieved without resorting to specific off-line bullying laws. Similarly, cyber-bullying needs to be targeted and stopped at the grass roots level.

The law should be there to backstop schools and parents in the most serious of cases. But new laws may become necessary depending on how cyber-bullying develops. Technology magnifies the potential for harm to be inflicted in ways we had not before imagined.

[Remember the recent Lori Drew case](). Who would have thought that a mother would make up a fictitious boy on MySpace, use the "boy" to court one of her teenage daughter's friends, then drop her coldly, causing the girl to commit suicide. Only in America - or maybe not.

[Nick Abrahams]() is a Partner and Sydney Chairman of the law firm Deacons. Victoria Dunn is a lawyer with Deacons.

Bullying can lead to mental illness, says study

Friday, 1 May 2009

Bullying can increase the risk of children suffering from psychotic symptoms by up to four times, researchers revealed today.

Effects included hallucinations, paranoid delusions – such as believing they are being spied on – and irrational thought.

Psychologists followed 6,437 children from birth to 13 years. The children took part in annual face-to-face interviews, as well as psychological and physical tests. Parents were also asked to complete questionnaires about their sons' and daughters' development.

At the age of 13, the children were interviewed about their experiences of psychotic symptoms in the previous six months. Those who suffered physical or emotional bullying were twice as likely to develop psychotic symptoms by early adolescence as children who were not bullied. Children who experienced sustained bullying over a number of years could be four times more at risk.

Professor Dieter Wolke said: "Our research shows adverse social relationships with peers may increase the risk of developing psychosis in adulthood."

Bullied boys: Why bright lads are being picked on

More than half of young people in Britain are affected by bullying – and studious pupils, especially boys, are the most vulnerable. **Hilary Wilce** looks at what can be done

Tommy Stenton was a bright boy who lived through hell in his last year of primary school and his first year at secondary school. The reason was that he was quiet and studious, so the other children picked on him for showing them up.

"What happened was that we moved and I had to change schools and I had no friends, so I was just keeping my head down and getting on with my books when it started. It was name-calling and people pushing and shoving me around. Also, the teacher didn't help. She used to say to the other kids that they weren't doing as much work as me and they'd have to stay in at break, and they didn't like that so they used to call me all sorts of things, like boffin and geek."

Tommy quickly started to hide his interest in his schoolwork. "I decided if I didn't do as well they wouldn't pick on me as much, so I used to try harder to get stuff wrong and act more stupid. I wasn't at the top of the class, and I wasn't at the bottom. Then, when I went up to secondary school, no one noticed because by then it was who I was."

It was Tommy's elder sister who found out how badly he was doing, recognised that it was out of character and told his teachers. "And after that it just got sorted." His teachers encouraged him, he grew in confidence and found friends of an equal intelligence. Now, at 15, he is happy at Danum School Technology College, an 11-18 comprehensive near Doncaster. He is predicted to get 11 GCSEs and hopes to do physics, chemistry and maths at A-level and become a teacher.

Natalie, 16, who lives in the South-east (and doesn't want to give her surname), is hoping that things will turn out as well for her younger brother Will, 11, who, like her, has been bullied for being clever. "He'd come home from primary school and run straight up to his room because he didn't want us to see he was upset. And it's a lot worse for guys, they often don't have the same social skills as girls."

Will is now in secondary school and has his girl twin and two older sisters looking out for him. "If we see anything happening, we go over and say 'You alright, Will?' and that usually sorts it."

But Natalie knows how important it is to get things sorted. From about nine she was bullied for being smart and speaking up in class. She was called names and had "lesbian" pictures planted in her bag. "So you start not answering questions, not writing things down, and not doing as well as you should do. There's always pressure not to perform well, and everyone wants to be popular and go along with the majority."

Despite this she managed to do well in her GCSEs, and is aiming for a career in psychology or criminology. "You come to realise that the bullies are going to be the ones that fail. My dad knows this. He was the only person in his road to go to grammar school and he got rinsed for it, but he saw that everyone else was still going to be there in 30 years' time, and they are. He's the only one who got out."

A recent study of gifted children in nine state secondary schools, by researchers at Roehampton University, has confirmed that clever pupils, especially boys, can be bullied and will "dumb down" to fit in. Being funny, good at sports and having a more disruptive pupil as a friend also helps. "Some pupils are able to maintain popularity with peers in spite of their high academic achievement," says Becky Francis, professor of education. "What appears to be a fundamental facilitator of this is their physical appearance, and for boys, their physical ability at sport."

Bullying the class "swot" has always been popular, but today's pupils say that the popularity of American high-school films, which often feature stereotypical boy geeks, has made it worse.

They say that in "ordinary" state schools it often feels as if there aren't other intelligent pupils around, and they believe that teachers make it worse by not realising that bullying is going on.

"We discovered that the main thing that made our pupils uncomfortable was to be seen winning things," says Fran Baker, assistant head at Edenham High School, an 11-16 comprehensive in Croydon that is successfully tackling bullying. "Often the teasing and bullying comes from children who know they aren't going to be the ones winning things. Disaffected pupils have low self-esteem and try to bring down the other children to their level."

As a result of talking to students, the school now has an honours system that rewards pupils for things besides academic achievement and has used a programme run by the charity Beatbullying to help change the culture, "which has been amazing. Obviously, we've known for quite some time that children get bullied for being geeky and nerdy," says Sarah Dyer, new media director and spokesperson for Beatbullying, "but all the research shows that over 50 per cent of young people in the UK are affected by bullying which means an absolutely huge impact of achievement if millions of children are dumbing down and not meeting their target attainments."

Beatbullying believes effective bullying prevention programmes can be set up in schools for £4 for each pupil. "Plenty of schools have poor programmes, but a good one is properly embedded and sustained. Once we implement a programme we return to it every three to six months and we are always looking ahead to things like training the next generation of peer mentors. This money is a drop in the ocean, but the Government still doesn't get it, even though it's prepared to spend £23m to combat knife and gun crime."

Beatbullying has just launched a national "cyber mentor" scheme, which allows pupils to access help online. The scheme has 850 mentors aged 11 to 25 and 25,000 pupils accessed it in its first month of operation. "We have absolutely smashed our targets already," says Sarah Dyer. "Young people love that they don't have to see anyone face-to-face. And boys especially have said that it wouldn't make any difference to them if their cyber mentor was a girl because there's no physical meeting."

For Natalie, who is a young cyber mentor, one key to change would be "for teachers to pick up on bullying more, but often they just want to get the lesson done and don't want to be bothered that only one person's answering all the questions. And maybe teachers could be more strict, or could stream children from a younger age."

Tommy Stenton thinks parents also need to change. "You need to know how your child is, and if you see a change then ask about it."

The bullying of "geeks", he says, goes on everywhere. "It's exactly the same in every school. It's so stupid. It gets people down. There's always a group ready to take the mess [sic] out of anything you do."

www.beatbullying.org, for help and advice on bullying; www.cybermentors.org.uk, for young people to get help from their peers and trained cyber councillors

'No-confidence' vote on bullying

Article from: **The Advertiser**

CALLIE WATSON

PARENTS have "lost confidence" in schools' ability to deal with bullying, with up to one in three saying their child had been bullied and attempts to stop it were unsuccessful.

An EducationNow survey reveals a high level of bullying at school, with 41.3 per cent of parents admitting their child had been a victim.

Of the 259 parents who responded, almost one third (29.2 per cent) said their child had been bullied and the school had not solved the problem.

This includes one mother who was told by a teacher that her son needed to "toughen up like the old days" after she approached him about bullying on three separate occasions.

Another 35.2 per cent of parents said they had faith the school would "act decisively" against the problem.

Adolescent psychologist Darryl Cross said while schools were "very good" at producing policies and procedures on bullying, they could be "very light" in implementing them.

"I don't know if that's because they haven't got experience or there's a concern about ostracising people, but they (teachers and principals) don't know quite what to do to handle the issue; that's the consistent picture that we get," he said.

"What we're seeing is parents who have lost confidence in approaching the school about bullying."

Past research suggests one in six children will report being bullied at some time at school.

South Australian Association of State School Organisations president David Knuckey said the survey results suggested bullying was being under-reported.

". . . You've got to won der if (parents) know what processes are in place for them to interact and get something done," Mr Knuckey said.

Child psychologist Dr Michael Carr-Gregg said some schools lacked the resources to tackle the issue.

"The common denominator among the schools that aren't handling bullying well is that they are often impoverished and don't have the resources to handle it (bullying) properly," he said.

The documented consequences of bullying include truancy, anxiety and depression, Dr Carr-Gregg said.

Other findings from the report show more than half of primary school and high school teachers surveyed believe students proven guilty of bullying should be suspended. They took the hardest stance on punishing proven bullies.

Dr Cross said this was because teachers were at the "coalface". "The school system itself is not following through and adequately dealing with the bully."

An Education Department spokeswoman said an anti-bullying policy was required at public schools.

The State Government's Coalition to Decrease Bullying, Harassment and Violence in South Australia has also been established.

School expels girls over cyber bullying

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Reporter: David Mark

Two teenage girls have been forced out of one of Sydney's elite private schools after they published material on social networking site Myspace about their classmates.

Transcript

LEIGH SALES, PRESENTER: Two adolescent girls have been forced out of one of Sydney's elite private schools because of cyber bullying.

The girls were taken out of Ascham school after they published material about their classmates on the MySpace social networking site.

The material included rumours about the girl's sexual activity and their drug and alcohol use.

A parent of one the girls targeted says his daughter was horrified when strange boys began approaching her in public.

David Mark reports.

DAVID MARK, REPORTER: It's one of the country's most prestigious and oldest schools. But Ascham's sandstone foundations have been shaken by a very modern problem - cyber-bullying.

VOICEOVER: "Everyone thought she was a sweet, nice girl who was never mean. She's actually a bitch and really mean about some people. She also sucks up to people."

DAVID MARK: That's just one entry in a four-page website posting that named and described dozens of year nine Ascham girls, and it was one of the mildest.

The post on the social networking site MySpace goes well beyond school-ground teasing. Some entries set out in explicit detail claims of sexual behaviour and drug and alcohol use.

In each case the names of girls and in many instances those of their sexual partners were published.

VOICEOVER: "Major slut. She went to a gathering at Bondi once and gave head to five guys. Flashed 10. She went out with… She smoke, drank, hooked up and gave him handy."

DAVID MARK: The father of one of the girls attacked on the website describes his daughter's reaction.

ASCHAM PARENT: Horror. She was one of the ones named in it. And all her friends were. Thirty or 40 were mentioned, were all in a, sort of a group.

DAVID MARK: He says the posting has spread beyond MySpace. The rumours have been emailed to other schools. She's since been getting attention from strangers.

ASCHAM PARENT: She was approached when she was in Bondi Junction last week. She was approached by all sorts, from boys' schools to everywhere else. And at a party she went to last Saturday night, everybody's aware of it.

DAVID MARK: The post was on the MySpace website for at least four days until it was removed last Thursday.

The school didn't act until the next day.

In a statement to Lateline, the school wrote: "We were shocked and deeply concerned about this incident and acted as swiftly as we became aware of it last Friday."

"Once the full nature of the incident became clear, the school concluded the girls' continued attendance at Ascham was not possible. The parents withdrew them from the school."

DR MARILYN CAMPBELL, QLD UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY: We actually think cyber bullying could be more damaging than face-to-face bullying because of the wider audience, because of the power of the written word, because of the 24-7 nature, and because of the disinhibition that some students feel.

DAVID MARK: Ascham does have measures in place to try to stop cyber bullying. The school bans its students from using social networking websites on school computers and has held presentations on the subject.

Several students also take part in a Federal Government cyber-bullying program, but Ascham acknowledges there's a limit to what schools can do to stop children using social networking sites, and experts agree.

DR MARILYN CAMPBELL: It is very difficult to stop them. In fact, what we actually need to do is more about educating them of why this is so harmful and why it's so hurtful.

DAVID MARK: The school has since written to parents warning them about the dangers of mobile phones and social networking websites. Ascham has offered counselling for the girls named in the posting.

David Mark, Lateline.

What can we do about cyber-bullying?

Marilyn Campbell

So the main message the ABC wants to promote is that bullying and cyber-bullying leads to suicide? With one in five children being bullied each week, even someone with a rudimentary knowledge of statistics would know that cannot be true. However, that is the impression I got after watching *Four Corners* on Monday 6 April.

Why would the producers do that? Just for sensationalism? To scare already scared parents? To scare young people to stop bullying?

Let's consider the story used in the *Four Corners* report to "illustrate" cyber-bullying. Did it have the three main conditions of bullying? Was there intent to hurt? Yes. Was there repetition of this intent to hurt? Yes. Was there an imbalance of power? No. It was therefore a fight. There was no bullying. Not that we shouldn't try to reduce fighting but it was not bullying.

Why is that distinction important? Because if we are all going to work towards reducing bullying and especially cyber-bullying then we all have to know what it is and what it is not.

Not only do many adults confuse fighting and bullying but they also confuse cyber-bullying and paedophilia. They think that anything bad which happens via technology like paedophilia, pornography, Internet addiction and cyber-bullying are the same. They are not and that is important because the solutions for different problems are different.

Even if we all agree on what bullying and cyber-bullying is there is no easy and quick-fix solution. Bullying and cyber-bullying are historical, deeply embedded, complex social relationship problems.

Technological solutions are not going to significantly reduce cyber-bullying. Not putting your full name and address on Facebook is good cyber-safety advice but won't prevent your peers from bullying you. Blocking and deleting bullying comments is like being told to ignore the bullying. Like, just ignore the pain and humiliation and don't complain.

I've been approached from people who want me to endorse devices for parents to monitor every mobile phone call to their children and block callers they don't know. Or a device to record mobile phone conversations so they are admissible in court. Are parents really going to, or need to, spy on their children like this?

Perhaps a legal solution might be the answer to cyber-bullying. Can't we just pass a law so that all cyber-bullying is illegal and then we can really punish the children responsible? Only trouble is that the vast majority of cyber-bullying is not criminal activity, although it is hurtful. 'UR a loser and we h8 U' is not criminal behaviour. And do we really want children to have criminal records? So is there anything positive that we can do?

Yes there are things that we can do to reduce bullying and cyber-bullying. But if we agree bullying is a complex pattern of social relationships modelled in our society, then everybody has to be involved - parents, schools, governments and students. Also many different strategies need to be implemented.

Firstly, people have to know that it is going on. The media exposure about bullying does help to raise awareness of the problem, especially cyber-bullying.

Second, people have to think it is not right for bullying to continue. Society's attitudes have changed. Thirty years ago bullying was considered a fundamental and normal part of childhood, it was a childhood rite of passage; it was character building. Now at least most people don't believe that.

Third, the policies in schools need to be put into practice. Whole school policies have been shown to be effective in reducing face-to-face bullying. In fact, it is the single most effective action a school can take. However, each policy needs to be individualised for that school and not taken in whole from another school. Unless the policy is translated into transparent daily use bullying will not be reduced.

Fourth, we have to encourage bystanders and victims to tell us because they often don't, fearing that their computer and mobile phone will be taken away from them. To increase the likelihood of reporting, first we have to believe the reporter and not to trivialise any complaint, but to treat it seriously and respectfully. Confidentiality in reporting (as much as possible) needs to be assured and solving the problem should be conceptualised as a joint affair, with adults resisting the urge to take a punishing role immediately. Setting out clear roles and responsibilities in this way, together with a statement of intent as to how complaints will be sought to be resolved, will further support the efficacy of school policies and should increase reporting rates.

Fifth, we need to educate parents.

Sixth we need to educate kids, not about protecting oneself but what to do if you are bullied, and

more importantly to show the bullies how to get their own way without abusing their power. Bystanders, usually peers, play an important role in perpetuating the cycle of bullying. Thus bullying, by whatever means, is a social problem and needs to be solved in a social context. The key is creating empathy in students. Peer helper programs, buddy programs and transition programs all support the ethos of a school to help one another. Curriculum programs incorporating the direct teaching of values education, empathy training and the use of stories and drama embedded in the curriculum, as well as direct teaching of 'netiquette', could all help to reduce cyber bullying.

Yes we can do something about cyber-bullying. Not in panic mode but with a real will in the community to educate and take positive and realistic steps.

Friendly Schools and Families:
The bullying reduction program that really works

The Friendly Schools & Families Program helps school communities enhance their skills, knowledge and capacity to implement an evidence based whole-school approach to the reduction of bullying. The Program provides 'small steps for success' from which schools can systematically implement and tailor strategies for the whole-school, classroom, individuals and families to reduce bullying.

An Evidence based bullying reduction program

The Friendly Schools and Families program is based on 6 years of rigorous scientific bullying research by staff from the Child Health Promotion Research Centre (CHPRC). Before designing and evaluating this program, staff of the CHPRC spent one year reviewing other international research to identify and then validate with experts empirically successful elements of a whole-school approach to reducing bullying. A four-year intervention research project, Friendly Schools (FS), was then implemented in 29 randomly selected Perth metropolitan primary schools (2000-2003) to evaluate the best whole-school strategies to reducing bullying. Using the results from the FS project, a second more targeted program which included a stronger focus on capacity building and involving families was developed. This three year research project called Friendly Schools Friendly Families (FSFF), involved 20 randomly selected primary schools (2002-2004).

This research has shown a very significant reduction in bullying behaviour, greater feelings of safety and happiness at school and an increase in social skills among children who received the Program compared to those who did not receive the Program. This research has also helped to identify the Program components that resulted in the greatest reduction of bullying. These components form the basis of the new Friendly Schools & Families Program, and are supported by case studies from schools that have implemented these materials.

Who would use this program?

The Friendly Schools & Families Program is designed to help all members of the school community including teachers, school administrators and parents. The Program is best coordinated by a representative whole-school committee ideally involving the Principal, however the Program comprises materials suitable for all members of the school community – i.e. school teaching and non-teaching staff, administrators, parents and students.

Many schools have already begun to take whole-school action to address bullying. For these schools, these resources provide the opportunity to review action, identify areas that may

require further attention and to engage in evidence-based activities that will maintain or enhance current school efforts in this area.

For schools that have not yet taken action, this Program provides guidance for developing and engaging in a whole-school response to bullying.

The Program guidelines and activities are designed to build on and support strategies to reduce bullying as advocated by the Australian National Safe Schools Framework.

Bullying of children and young people (Inquiry)

This inquiry is a current Legislative Council inquiry conducted by the [General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2](#).

This Inquiry was established on 4 December 2009, to inquire into, and report on, best practice approaches to reduce bullying of children and young people.

This Inquiry is self referred.

The Committee invites public participation in the inquiry process. Written submissions addressing the inquiry terms of reference can be emailed, faxed or mailed to the committee secretariat by the closing date, 13 March 2009.

The Committee has decided to accept submissions after the formal closing date of Friday 13 March 2009. If you would like to make a submission please contact the Secretariat on 9230 3544.

Timeline

Self-referred: 4 Dec 2008
   » Call for submissions: 4 Dec 2008
   » Submissions close: 13 Mar 2009

School teachers the victims of bullying

ALMOST all school teachers have been bullied in the workplace, often by senior staff or the principal, according to a national study.

The University of New England study of 800 school staff members from government, non-government primary and secondary schools found that 99.6 per cent of staff had experienced one or more of 44 types of bullying identified in the survey.

In the report, the research team said the results showed bullying of staff "does occur at Australian schools".

"The survey's findings are highly disturbing because zero tolerance to any form of bullying is the expected norm in Australian schools," said Dr Dan Riley of the University of New England, in northern NSW.

He said the target of the bullying was usually lower in the staff hierarchy than the perpetrator.

"The report reveals that the most persistent bullies were identified as the school executive staff and then the principal and that the typical victim is a teacher," Dr Riley said.

Some of the 44 types of bullying listed in the survey included tasks set with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines, and attempts to belittle and undermine a staff member's work.

Search

'Bullying of staff does occur in schools,' report says

A national online survey of school teachers has shown that almost all of the participants have been the targets of some form of bullying in the workplace.

More than 800 school staff members participated in the study, which found that 99.6 per cent of them had experienced one or more of the 44 kinds of bullying listed in the survey.

The Executive Summary of the research team's report, published this week, says the results "highlight the indisputable fact that bullying of staff does occur in Australian schools". "When bullying affects the mental and physical health of those being bullied, as results show, then it is time for some action to be taken to eliminate staff bullying," the report says.

"The survey's findings are highly disturbing, as zero tolerance to any form of bullying is the expected norm in Australian schools," said the University of New England's Dr Dan Riley, who led the team that conducted the research.

The research focused on answering the following questions: "Does bullying of staff occur? Who are the bullies and who are the targets? Who are the persistent bullies? Who are the primary targets? What forms of bullying of staff occur? What is the effect of bullying on the individual? Are there gender differences in the incidence, form and effects of bullying? What strategies diminish the practice of bullying?"

Dr Riley said the results showed that bullying was "very much related to a power imbalance", with the target of bullying usually being lower in the staff hierarchy than the perpetrator. "The report reveals that the most persistent bullies were identified as the school executive staff and then the principal, and that the typical victim is a teacher," he said.

"Staff bullying at schools relates to situations where an adult is either the perpetrator or target of bullying," he explained. "It has been defined as 'repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individual(s) which involve a power imbalance and create a hostile work environment." The 44 kinds of bullying listed in the survey include "tasks set with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines", "attempts to belittle and undermine your work", and "areas of responsibility removed or added without consultation".

"A major implication of the results is the role that leadership should be taking in eliminating the phenomenon of staff bullying," the report says.

Dr Riley's colleagues on the research team were Professor Deirdre Duncan from the Australian Catholic University National, and the statistical analyst John Edwards. The survey covered primary and secondary schools in both the government and non-government sectors in all Australian States and Territories.

The Executive Summary of the research report (*Investigation of Staff Bullying in Australian Schools*, Riley D., Duncan D.J. and Edwards J., 2009) is available free at www.schoolbullies.org.au, and the full report will be available later this month at info@schoolbullies.auz.info.

Staff Bullying in Australian Schools

While there is considerable research about student bullying in schools there is very little research on staff bullying. The term 'staff bullying' is used to differentiate between the 'playground bully' who is identified as a student and the 'staff bully' who is identified as an adult; the term 'staff bullying' also includes the bullying of staff by students. Staff bullying relates to situations where an adult is either the perpetrator or target of bullying and has been defined as 'repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individual(s) which involve a persistent power imbalance and create a hostile work environment'.

In 2007 Riley, Duncan and Edwards completed the first national online survey into staff bullying in Australian schools. The population of interest was employees in Australian schools in all States and Territories, including primary and secondary schools in both the Government and non-Government sectors. The survey found that 99.6% of respondents had experienced one or more of the forty-four instances of bullying listed in the survey - a highly disturbing finding in an area where zero tolerance to any form of bullying is the expected norm in Australian schools.

The research focused on answering the following questions: Does bullying of staff occur? Who are the bullies and who are the targets? Who are the persistent bullies? Who are the primary targets? What forms of bullying of staff occur? What is the effect of bullying on the individual? Are there gender differences in the incidence, form and effects of bullying? What strategies diminish the practice of bullying?

Riley, Duncan and Edwards draw the following conclusion, "The research findings highlight the indisputable fact that bullying of staff does occur in Australian schools and when it affects the mental and physical health of those being bullied, as our results show, then it is time for some action to be taken to eliminate staff bullying. A major implication of the results is the role that leadership should be taking in eliminating the phenomenon of staff bullying."

The Executive Summary of this research (Investigation of Staff Bullying in Australian Schools, Riley D., Duncan D.J, and Edwards J. 2009) is available from this website (www.schoolbullies.org.au) and the report will be available in May 2009 from The Co-op Bookshop and can be purchased online.

About the authors:

Dr Dan Riley is a senior lecturer at the University of New England with extensive experience with Government, Catholic and Independent schools. Dan is a strong advocate for the identification and prevention of the phenomenon of adult bullying in the workplace.

Dr Deirdre Duncan is an Adjunct Professor of ACU National. She has extensive experience in senior leadership positions in education and has published widely in the areas of leadership, school law, organisational change and school culture. Her most recent research has been on staff bullying in schools.

John Edwards is a statistical analyst with over twenty years experience teaching in secondary schools and has lectured in research methodology at university. In 2005 and 2007 he was part of a research team with Duncan and Riley investigating adult bullying in Australian schools.

Claims school ignores bully reports

Melanie Maeseele

Parents of students at Mt Tarampa State School outside of Ipswich are concerned teachers are ignoring claims of bullying.

File photo

BULLYING is so out of control at a small rural school that parents are threatening to pull their children out while some have already done so.

One child was so badly terrorised at Mt Tarampa State School, about 40km north-west of Ipswich, that after years of bullying his mother pulled him out of the school.

Kathrine Rodgers said she was so concerned about her nine-year-old son being abused that she reported the incidents to the school repeatedly - but his ordeal continued for two years.

"He was being bullied and harassed constantly," Ms Rodgers said. "One time he even got hit with a star picket in the middle of his back."

The turning point for Ms Rodgers was when her son, who was in year four at the time, was punched repeatedly.

Ms Rodgers said she reported the incidents but little was done.

After witnessing more students being bullied at the school she has gained the courage to support other parents in their fight to stop the bullying.

A teacher, who cannot be named, worked at the school for more than a year and described the classrooms as "out of control".

The teacher said she left after a year because her concerns fell on "deaf ears".

"Some of the students should be expelled or suspended because they are out of control," she said.

"There are students at that school who shouldn't be there because their behaviour is unacceptable and disruptive to other children and they need more support than is available."

Another parent, who asked not to be named, said her two sons aged 10 and 8 were constantly being bullied and victimised at the school.

"They are getting beaten up on a regular basis and they are absolutely petrified of going to school," she said.

"They get their hair pulled, stomach punched and kicked and it doesn't matter how many times I tell the school nothing changes."

But she is confident with a bit of help she can make the school a safer environment for her children.

"I have them crying and pleading with me every day to not make them go to school but my only hope is that things will change," she said.

No one from Education Queensland was available to comment yesterday.

Bullies dampen Blake's spirit

BLAKE Hammond stares at the floor and tries to list, almost in a whisper, the times he has been "kicked and punched" by students at Wilsonton State School.

He can't.

The tiny seven-year-old says he has been beaten up four days a week for more than a year — too many times to count.

The year 3 pupil spoke to The Chronicle yesterday, after it published a story about the culture of bullying at the primary school.

He has been held down and beaten while a hand held over his mouth muffled his screams. He has been pelted with rotten fruit. He has been bruised — a purple mark showing the fierce imprint of a hand.

"Sometimes I don't want to go to school because I might get bashed up," Blake said.

"But I want to learn lots. I don't know why I'm picked on."

His mum Jodie Hammond says the bullies are not punished. Blake comes home so often with bruises and scratches that his father Luke Hawkett has considered sitting in the school yard to ensure his child's safety.

Meanwhile, the Department of Education denies there is a bullying problem.

"Nothing gets done," Ms Hammond said.

Blake's best friend Jake Cooke is also a target.

His mother Emily Cooke plans to move him from the school. She says her son is "not the same boy" she sent to prep three years ago.

"His self-confidence has gone since he started coming home in year two with scratches on his back and bruises," she said. "It was a difficult decision to pull him out because he has made friends. If it wasn't for that, it would be a no-brainer."

After appearing in The Chronicle's story yesterday, mum Natalya Edser was shocked to receive a phone call from deputy principal Trevor Mancktelow.

"He called me to tell me my daughter had been assaulted at school," Miss Edser said.

"Another boy kicked her in the leg. At least this time they phoned to let us know something was

wrong.

"All the students who have been bullied and all the parents who have suffered from it need an apology from that school."

Blake's parents are considering leaving Wilsonton.

Blake said: "I'd prefer to go to another school because maybe the kids might not bully me there. Maybe."

Bullying puts young homosexuals at risk

Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are attempting suicide and harming themselves at an alarming rate because of bullying in Queensland schools, a report shows.

The Open Doors Action Research Report 2008 shows that over the past 12 months 37 per cent of affected young people had attempted suicide and 82 per cent had considered suicide.

It also showed that of the 164 participants who completed the anonymous online survey, 59 per cent had harmed themselves.

"Given that LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) young people reported extensive maltreatment and lack of support, it is unsurprising that they also reported high rates of self-harm, suicide ideation and suicide attempts," the report by the support organisation Open Doors says.

The report highlights schools as a significant source of distress for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people.

Four out of five respondents reported they had been bullied for their sexuality at school, but only 12 per cent said the school took action to stop the bullying.

"Bullying not only came from students. Adults such as teachers, school administrators and parents also bullied LGB students," the report says.

"Many young people felt so afraid at school that they had missed over two school weeks worth of classes to ensure their safety.

"Clearly current school anti-bullying measures do not adequately protect LGB students - this is providing a discriminatory educational environment for LGB students which is illegal.

"Schools need to take further actions to ensure LGB students are safe at school."

Sexual health education at schools was also found to be inadequate, as out of the two-thirds of LGB young people who reported that they had engaged in sex, only two per cent reported being adequately educated in practising safe sex.

"It is essential that LGB young people are provided equal opportunity to their heterosexual peers to learn about safer sex," the report said.

The average participant in the survey was 17, attending school and sexually active.

The report stated 98 per cent of participants were certain of their sexual orientation.

Open Doors Youth Service has operated since 2001, tackling youth homelessness in the greater Brisbane area.

Daunting school taunts hit home

Emma O'Neill

SARA BOND has an above-average IQ, plays the guitar and dreams of being a marine biologist.

It's hard to imagine this quietly-spoken 14-year-old causing offence, but she has stayed home from school for at least 10 days this year in order to avoid the taunts of bullies.

"Sometimes people tease me because I get the right answer in class; they tell me to shut up," she said. "I try to ignore them, but it's hard."

Sarah said she wished bullies knew how it felt to be on the other side.

Sarah's mum, Michelle Bond, said she worried about her daughter and wished the bullying would stop.

But things got worse this week, she said.

"The bullying these kids are dealing with these days is a problem that doesn't just stop in the playground. Sarah has told me it's happened in the school bus and through her phone," she said. "The text messages she received this week are really serious and there was one threat against her life. It's really scary."

Mrs Bond said she could always tell when her daughter had been bullied at school, but said Sarah didn't always talk about it.

"She just gets quiet and I know something has happened," she said.

Sarah said it wasn't easy to talk about the bullying to her friends, the school counsellor or her family.

"It's hard to talk about it, but it always seems to help when I do," she said.

Manager of relationship services at Interrelate, Thea Keane, said bullying could be defined as 'any instance where someone intimidates or hurts another person or a group of people'.

"Bullying is definitely not restricted to the schoolyard," she said.

The Northern Star has launched a campaign to stamp out bullying and would welcome your story, or your ideas on how best our community should tackle the problem.

Our kids in worst class of bullies

Erik Jensen and Rachel Browne

BULLYING in Australian primary schools is in the worst category in the world, a new study of education standards has found.

In the *Trends In International Mathematics And Science Study*, which surveyed schools in about 40 countries, more than a quarter of Australian year 4 students said they had suffered bullying.

The results have alarmed child-health experts and education bodies, which have been running strict anti-bullying programs in schools over the past six years.

Australian primary school students suffer bullying at a rate of almost 50 per cent above the international average, putting Australia in the worst category for bullying. Of the 36 countries sampled in the survey of year 4 students, only Kuwait, Qatar, Taiwan and New Zealand fared worse than Australia.

The research, which showed Australia lagging behind its neighbours and even Kazakhstan in maths and science education, found more than a quarter of Australian year 4 students had been bullied in at least three ways in the month before they were tested. The study was produced by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. Students were asked whether they had experienced any of five antisocial behaviours in the past month: whether something of theirs had been stolen, whether they had been hurt by other students, whether they had been made to do things against their will, whether they had been teased and whether they had been excluded by others.

In Australia, where almost 460 schools took part in the study, 26percent of year 4 students had encountered at least three of the behaviours in the month in question.

Internationally, 42 per cent of primary students said they had experienced none of the behaviours. In Australia it was less than 33 per cent.

NSW Education Minister Verity Firth would not say whether she was surprised by the figures but said she had strengthened principals' powers to deal with bullying, increasing suspension periods to 20 days.

"NSW schools are safe places and bullying and stealing are not tolerated," a spokesman for the minister said.

"Every school is required to have an anti-bullying plan. As part of the new annual school reports, principals must now also detail for parents the actions they are taking to stamp out this intolerable behaviour."

The results alarmed the president of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, Dianne Giblin, who called for strengthening of anti-bullying policies. "Those figures are of huge concern," she said.

"We have some very strong anti-bullying policies in place but schools need to ensure they implement these programs. They need to be reminded of them. The policy needs to be reiterated to students."

NSW Teachers Federation acting president Bob Lipscombe said anti-bullying policies in schools were working.

"There is a great deal of evidence to show that anti-bullying programs are effective," he said.

However, Stacey Waters, a research fellow at the Child Health Promotion Research Centre at Edith Cowan University in Perth, said there had been no significant change in the prevalence of bullying in Australia. It was the type of bullying that had changed.

"Eighty-three per cent of kids who are face-to-face bullied are also cyber bullied," she said.

Open Doors Action Research Report 2008

There's No Place Like Home: An investigation into Action the health and housing status of Queensland's Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual young people

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) young people endure discrimination and prejudice which is associated with their greater rates of homelessness, early school drop-out, social isolation, emotional distress, suicide and self harm.

The Open Doors Action Research Report 2008 examines the health and housing statuses of Queensland's LGB young people aged 12-20. 164 participants completed an anonymous online survey which collected details about their demographic characteristics (such as age and location), health and housing. The average participant was 17 years of age, attending school, and sexually active, which makes the research findings particularly relevant to high schools and sexual health services. 98% of participants were certain of their sexual orientation and 49% had become comfortable with their sexuality before the age of 15.

LGB young people reported high levels of discrimination, harassment, bullying, abuse and social alienation at school, home, and in their communities. Given that LGB young people reported extensive maltreatment and lack of support, it is unsurprising that they also reported high rates of self harm, suicide ideation, suicide attempts, and substance use. Nonetheless the rates were startling – within the past 12 months 37% of LGB young people had attempted suicide, 82% had considered suicide, and 59% had self harmed.

It is imperative that Queensland's communities, families, services and schools become more accepting and supportive of young LGB people. Schools were a significant source of distress for LGB young people. 81% had been bullied for their sexuality at school but only 12% reported that the school took action to stop the bullying. Bullying not only came from students; adults such as teachers, school administrators and parents also bullied LGB students. Diverse forms of bullying and harassment were employed. Many young people felt so afraid at school that they had missed over two school week's worth of classes to ensure their safety. Clearly current school antibullying measures do not adequately protect LGB students and Education Queensland need to take further actions to ensure LGB students are safe at school.

Sexual health education at school was also found to be inadequate; while two thirds of LGB young people reported that they had engaged in sex, only 2% reported that their sexual health education provided them with enough information for them to know how to practice safer sex. It is essential that LGB young people are provided equal opportunity to their heterosexual peers to learn about safer sex.

Over one third (34%) of LGB young people collectively reported that they had endured sexual abuse, which is substantially higher than the generally reported 25% of young women and 17% of young men.

In regard to drug use LGB young people reported they used alcohol and marijuana most frequently. 89% of LGB young people reported that drank alcohol and 29% of LGB young people reported that they smoked marijuana. Most alarmingly 71% of LGB young people reported that they would drink to get drunk with 34% reporting that they drank weekly. High rates of mental health diagnoses (34%) were also reported.

It is hoped that this research report will provide impetus for improving service provision towards LGB young people, particularly in regard to their emotional wellbeing, school lives, social connectivity, sexual and physical health, and accommodation.

ABOUT OPEN DOORS YOUTH SERVICE INC.

Open Doors Youth Service Inc. has operated since 2001 and provides early intervention services that relate to youth homelessness, and risk factors thereof, within the greater Brisbane area. Its client population are young people aged 12-18 years who are identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT), or who are unsure of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The families of such young people are also clients.

Open Doors values and celebrates the legitimacy of LGBT identities and the diversity within LGBT communities. Holistic, innovative and dynamic services are employed which assist young people in creative, accessible and culturally appropriate ways.

Open Doors is committed to challenging homophobia, stereotypes and discrimination. Across Queensland, Open Doors provides community awareness education, and training to other services, in order to improve communities' capacities to respond to young LGBT people's needs.

Open Doors provides:
• Assistance with accessing accommodation, employment, education, training and support to access appropriate health services;

• Support and information to the families and support networks of young people to enhance relationships and understanding, enabling young people to remain in the home environment, or at least maintain positive contact;

• Individual counselling and support to young people exploring issues of sexuality and gender identity; and

• Sector and community development to services and communities in Queensland to increase their connection to and support of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people.

FOREWORD

Open Doors is one of Australia's unique, vital and irreplaceable institutions which champions the cause of a group of young people who are both vilified and neglected in their communities. We are, in 2008, in the very middle of a wave of social change that carries with it the promise of acceptance and inclusion for people of all sexualities. However, integral to social change is struggle and in this report by Open Doors we see a terrible struggle in which the worst of society's behaviour is manifested against young people who are same
sex attracted. We have learned from this important report with 164 same sex attracted young people that homophobic abuse is commonplace in many aspects of their lives, especially at school. We have also learned that abuse like this has negative impacts with young people feeling unsafe, being frightened and understandably, missing school. We learn from young people in this report that school is also neglectful, with 89% reporting not receiving adequate sex education. These finding reflect what is happening in other states of Australia
and represents gross violations of schools' duty of care and young people's right to a safe, inclusive and relevant learning environment. I commend the young people who took part in this research and who gave so generously of their experiences because it is their voices that will make a difference. I also congratulate Open Doors for producing another fine piece of research which helps these young people's voices be heard. Finally I am comforted by the work of organisations and people like Open Doors who literally save the lives of same sex attracted youth by helping them to find community, develop trust and learn that they are not alone.

Lynne Hillier
Dr Lynne Hillier
Senior Research Fellow

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