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Fighting the School Bullies – What Needs to be Done?

This Research Brief discusses the changing nature of bullying (including the increase in cyber bullying) and studies examining the impact bullying has on victimised children, the bullying student, and bystanders. It then discusses the National Safe Schools Framework, an initiative of federal, state and territory governments and other stakeholders, which provides an agreed national approach to help schools address bullying. Various approaches that have been taken by Australian education authorities to address the problem are also considered, including a range of intervention methods that are currently used by schools.

The approach taken by the Queensland Government to combat bullying and other inappropriate student behaviour through the Code of School Behaviour and the Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students is discussed before moving on to a brief overview of the policies and programs in other states and territories.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bullying among school students is something which has probably occurred ever since schools were established. However, it has recently come to the notice of the media, the community and governments at all levels.

In **Section 2** this Research Brief considers certain **incidents** that have highlighted the issue and then, in **Section 3**, discusses how the nature of bullying has changed so that it includes not only physical and verbal harassment but, also, ‘**cyber bullying**’ – attacks over the Internet or via a mobile phone. This is followed by an examination of various studies about the **effects** of bullying on the victim and on the perpetrator, noting that the consequences can last into adulthood: **Sections 4-7**.

The Brief then discusses the **National Safe Schools Framework**, an initiative of federal, state and territory governments and other stakeholders, which provides an agreed national approach to help schools address bullying. All Australian schools must implement the Framework as a condition of ongoing funding: **Section 8**.

In line with the tenor of the Framework, there has been a range of **approaches** adopted to combat bullying, particularly the development and implementation of anti-bullying policies, described in **Section 9**. A brief discussion of the various **methods** and **programs** used in Australian schools and throughout the world to deal with the issue – including sanctions, ‘buddy systems’, ‘restorative justice practices’ and the ‘method of shared concern’ is provided.

Consideration is given to **Education Queensland’s Code of School Behaviour** and supporting *Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students* which must be implemented by all schools: **Section 10**. Schools need to have particular strategies in place to promote appropriate student behaviour as well as consequences for unacceptable behaviour set out in their *Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students*.

The Brief then provides an overview of the various codes, plans, policies and programs in **other Australian jurisdictions** to address the prevalence of bullying in schools: **Section 11**.

Lastly, various suggestions from the experts are provided in **Section 12** to help **parents** know how to help their child if he or she is a victim of bullying.

1 INTRODUCTION

Being bullied at school is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the range of weapons through which the harassment of classmates can be carried out; hence the advent of ‘cyber bullying’. Whatever the form of the bullying, the impact on the victimised child can be devastating and long lasting. The issue is currently receiving renewed attention with media coverage of recent ‘cyber’ attacks on students.

This Research Brief discusses the changing nature of bullying (including the increase in cyber bullying) and studies examining the impact bullying has on victimised children, the bullying student, and bystanders. It then discusses the National Safe Schools Framework, an initiative of federal, state and territory governments and other stakeholders, which provides an agreed national approach to help schools address bullying. Various measures that have been taken by Australian education authorities to address the problem are also considered, including a range of intervention methods that are currently used by schools.

The approach taken by the Queensland Government to combat bullying and other inappropriate student behaviour through the *Code of School Behaviour* and the *Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students* is discussed before moving on to a brief overview of some of the policies and programs in other states and territories.

2 BACKGROUND

In May 2007, the then Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, pointed to research indicating that nearly 20% of boys and almost 15% of girls report having been bullied at least once a week throughout Australia.¹

There are many definitions of ‘bullying’ in the relevant literature, with no universally agreed meaning – but an edifying description of the behaviour is given by the Kids Help Line, a confidential national telephone counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25. It defines ‘bullying’ as *deliberate psychological, emotional and/or physical harassment of one person by another, or a group, occurring at*

¹ Hon Julie Bishop MP, Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, ‘Howard Government Supporting Safe Australian Schools’, *Australian Government Media Release*, 24 May 2007.

*school or in transit between school and home. [It] includes exclusion from peer group, intimidation, extortion and violence.*²

Renewed interest in the issue was sparked by media coverage, in 2007, of incidents captured by mobile phone cameras, including footage of two Victorian schoolgirls kicking another girl in the head.³ This unpleasant scene prompted the then Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Hon Tony Abbott MP, to suggest a return to corporal punishment in some instances, to restore school discipline. The call met with opposition from child protection experts and Federal Labor's then Deputy Leader.⁴ In July 2007, a further bullying episode was reported – this time in Western Australia where a Perth teenager was allegedly subjected to a protracted assault over a period of six hours during which the boy was said to have been pushed into a makeshift grave and covered with dirt.⁵ In Melbourne, a coronial inquiry has been announced to investigate the suicide, reported to be linked to cyber bullying, of a 17 year old girl in April 2008.⁶

Closer to home, there have been recent reports of school violence including a fight between girls at a Gold Coast school, some footage of which was apparently posted on the YouTube video sharing website.⁷ There is a further case of a Brisbane teenager telling the Richlands Magistrates Court that she intended pleading guilty to stalking a 15 year old student who claimed she had been subjected to cyber bullying and threatening SMS messages.⁸ In November 2007, it was reported in the news media that an 11 year old boy was suspended from school after taking a knife to class, apparently for the purpose of defending himself after having been spat on and punched by other students.⁹ He was said to be 'fed up' with the constant attacks and brought the knife to school after apparently being threatened by a classmate the previous day. While the boy's mother apparently supported the suspension decision, she is reported to have questioned whether the school was

² Kids Help Line, *Bullying Information Sheet*, April 2003, <http://www.kidshelp.com.au>.

³ Misha Schubert, 'Kids may need the strap: Abbott', *Age Online*, 16 June 2007.

⁴ Misha Schubert.

⁵ Nicolas Perpetch & Andrea Hayward, 'Brawl over bullying – Horror claims prompt political stoush', *Courier Mail*, 6 July 2007, p 17.

⁶ Fiona Purdon, 'Taking the bully out of Cyberia', *Courier Mail*, 26 April 2008, p 51.

⁷ 'Make school laws tougher: Opposition', *brisbanetimes.com.au*, 9 April 2008.

⁸ Fiona Purdon.

⁹ Catriona Murtagh, 'Pushed too far: bashed student resorted to knife', *Cairns Post*, 22 November 2007, p 1.

doing enough to crack down on bullying. The boy reported that, after he was suspended, he was set upon by students who were waiting for him after his dentist appointment. *'It hurt so bad,'* the boy told the reporter. *'I got kicked to the ground. I blacked out...'* The boy's mother also commented that these attacks were the culmination of years of bullying which began, according to his mother, because *'he used to be naughty'*. The boy apparently had been coping with issues of anger and ADHD. An Education Queensland spokeswoman is reported to have been unable to comment on the case for privacy reasons but said that bullying is not tolerated in schools and parental concerns were taken seriously.¹⁰

The report of the damages award, in May 2007, of almost \$1 million to an 18 year old former victim of bullying at a New South Wales school may have caused some disquiet for all education authorities across the nation. Benjamin Cox was just six years old when he was bullied by an older student at his NSW school, including being beaten to unconsciousness. The harassment occurred for around 18 months up to September 1995 when his parents removed him from the school.¹¹ It is reported that the boy's mother repeatedly complained to the teacher, the principal and other school authorities but the persecution of Ben continued. Ben's mother is said to have given evidence that a Department of Education officer told her that bullying *'builds character and that he thought it was a good thing that Ben got bullied.'* It appears that Ben dropped out of school in Year 7, developed depression, an anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress. As a result, at 18 years of age, he is overweight, housebound and cannot obtain a job.¹²

Given that law firms are reportedly receiving inquiries from past victims of bullying at school, it seems that more and more former sufferers may be looking for redress from the schools at which the incidents occurred.¹³ After all, schools and teachers do have a duty to protect students from harm.¹⁴

Once upon a time, dealing with the school bully was seen almost as a 'lesson in life' or a painful rite of passage. However, attitudes have changed. In 2002, the

¹⁰ Catriona Murtagh.

¹¹ Miranda Devine, 'A bullying culture begins at home', *Sydney Morning Herald Online*, 16 May 2007.

¹² Miranda Devine.

¹³ Miranda Devine.

¹⁴ Paul Weston, 'Teachers in legal trap – Dealing with schoolyard violence "a minefield"', *Sunday Mail*, 1 June 2008, p 41, referring to legal advice from Macrossans Solicitors issued to members of the Queensland Teachers Union.

American Medical Association warned that bullying has become a public health issue with long-term mental health consequences for both bullies and victims.¹⁵

There is some research suggesting the possibility that having been subjected to bullying may have been a factor in some of the recent school massacre episodes in the USA.¹⁶ In a small Kentucky town in December 1997, three students at a prayer group meeting were shot by a 14 year old student who had been teased at school, while in October that year, a 16 year old Mississippi student stabbed his mother and two classmates. It was later revealed that the boy had been ridiculed by other students for being fat and shy. In a paper he had allegedly written, the student said that he killed because ‘people like me are mistreated every day ... I did this to show society, “Push us and we will push back”’.¹⁷ While the gunman who shot and killed 32 people at the Virginia Tech in April 2007 appeared to have many psychological problems, there was some suggestion that he too had been bullied throughout his student life.¹⁸ It has also been reported that Martin Bryant, who went on a shooting rampage killing 35 people at Port Arthur in Tasmania, was a victim of bullying at school.¹⁹

The *Sunday Mail* recently profiled the rise of gang violence in Australian schools that is seemingly mirroring gang culture in US campuses. In particular, it is groups of youths known as ‘Gangstas’, identified by their love of violent rap music and baggy clothing, that other students are said to fear the most.²⁰ Queensland students told the *Sunday Mail* that the ‘Gangsta’ members carry pocket knives to school and a parent of a girl who recently graduated said that there were ‘six or seven of these students in Year 8 who surrounded my daughter. They punched and kicked her, rammed her into a brick wall. They picked her up and dumped her head-first into a garbage bin. She ended up with renal bleeding’.²¹ It is also reported that police later cautioned the most violent bully and that the gang leader was later expelled. The mother of the

¹⁵ M Lemonick, ‘The Bully Blight’, *Time Magazine*, 18 April 2005, pp 48-49.

¹⁶ Federal Department of Education, Science and Training, ‘National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying’, <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/2FC379D8-2839-4247-A01F-192CD5AE3037/1640/ResearchSummary.pdf>, para 5.1, citing some US Secret Service Studies.

¹⁷ Megan Turner, ‘Young and deadly’, *Courier Mail*, 26 March 1998, p 15.

¹⁸ Stefanie Balogh, ‘Many faces of a madman – Chilling ramblings from beyond the grave reveal mass killer’s tortured mind’, *Courier Mail*, 20 April 2007, p 4.

¹⁹ Miranda Devine.

²⁰ Paul Weston, ‘Culture Shock’, *Sunday Mail*, 27 April 2008, pp 53-54.

²¹ Paul Weston.

aforementioned girl also told the paper that she had made a number of complaints to Education Queensland and school administrators but, after disciplinary action was taken, the gang would choose more indirect forms of bullying: *'It becomes more covert.... The student is usually defamed... through verbal abuse ... or through the Internet.'* The mother said that an education bureaucrat had told her that her *'kids have to learn to swim in the mainstream. Society has changed. Get over it'*.²² The woman is reported to have said that the impact on her Year 12 son with a promising sporting future had been devastating and he recently took time off school after receiving threatening emails. He wrote a letter to his parents that said that he did not *'want to go back to [the school] because I have no friends. I get bullied by [the group] and teased.... What do I need to happen for me to feel OK about [the school]?'*²³

There are many seemingly unlikely victims of bullying. For example, the America's Cup winning yachtsman, John Bertrand, was bullied by the 'school toughie' as a 14 year old, being cornered and verbally intimidated until the bully finally moved on to other victims. AFL star and Brownlow medallist, Jason Akermenis, was picked on at school because he had red hair and, later, was victimised because he chose AFL over rugby at a 'strong rugby school' in Queensland. As a 14 year old, the teasing escalated to violence and he was kicked in the knee sufficiently hard to suffer injury.²⁴ Both men have vivid memories of their experiences and John Bertrand is involved in an anti-bullying program – the Better Buddies Program – in schools.

3 THE CHANGING NATURE OF BULLYING

The image of the schoolyard bully has traditionally been that of a tough lout (usually male), or a sporty, 'good-looking' type, with a penchant for teasing, persecuting or hurting other students. The bully might act alone or, more commonly, with a group of mates. The targets of the abuse would tend to be children who were smaller, weaker or were 'different from the norm' in some way.²⁵ However, as was seen above, victims of bullies need not fit any of those descriptions.

²² Paul Weston.

²³ Paul Weston.

²⁴ R Higson, 'School of Hard Knocks', *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 29-30 January 2005, pp 12-16, p 16.

²⁵ These characteristics are among those that young people who call the Kids Help Line identify as a reason for victimisation: see Kids Help Line, *Bullying Information Sheet*.

The more 'subtle' or 'indirect' bullying tactics like avoidance, exclusion, rumour-spreading and cyber bullying do not leave the victim with physical wounds but the mental and emotional scars can be equally devastating. Possibly because physical violence is more obvious to teachers, it has declined in recent years while the more indirect types of bullying have grown.²⁶

As bullying is no longer confined to physical aggression, there has been some change in the characteristics of persecutors. Cyber bullying, rumour-spreading and exclusion from the group can be equally engaged in by females and males. That is because physical strength is no requirement for these insidious and cruel bullying techniques. Research over the past decade has noted that females are more likely to be victims of more 'indirect' forms such as exclusion.²⁷

However, more 'traditional' types of bullying do still occur. In a University of Queensland study, published in 2004, of students in Years 8 and 10 at three Queensland high schools, over 69% of the 69 respondents reported having been bullied. For both groups, the most common types of bullying (in order) were name calling, exclusion and rumour spreading. Boys appear to have been victims of physical attacks more than girls and girls subject to more indirect bullying.²⁸

Dr Ken Rigby of the University of South Australia, an education specialist with expertise in bullying behaviour, claims that male and female bullies tend to engage in indirect bullying in much the same way although there is anecdotal evidence that girls are becoming more physically abusive.²⁹ He considers that there are unrealistic stereotypes that girls are mean, manipulative and bully their victims through spreading rumours or excluding them from the group while boys are the physical bullies and do not engage in the indirect types of bullying.³⁰

²⁶ Kids Help Line, *Bullying Information Sheet*.

²⁷ Kids Help Line, *Bullying Information Sheet*, citing K Rigby, 'What Children Tell Us About Bullying in Schools', *Children Australia*, 22(2) 1997, pp 28-34 and other studies.

²⁸ J Martin & R M Gillies, School of Education, University of Queensland, 'How Adolescents Cope with Bullying', *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 14(2), 2004 pp 195-210, pp 199-200. The authors say that the small sample size may have elevated the prevalence of bullying in the students surveyed but, overall, it supports the notion that bullying occurs often and is a problem. Only 69 of the 88 survey responses were valid to use in the analysis.

²⁹ Dr Ken Rigby in R Higson, p 14.

³⁰ Dr Ken Rigby in R Higson, p 14.

3.1 CYBER BULLYING AND OTHER TECHNOLOGICAL ATTACKS

The availability of technology has provided new ‘weapons of choice’ for students to bully others. Sending hostile or abusive text messages to a victim’s mobile phone or e-mail box and posting malicious or private information about a classmate in blogs are, sadly, becoming more common. Some proponents use Internet chat rooms and social networking sites such as MySpace while some apparently establish websites designed to ridicule victims.³¹ There have been reports of such a website that targeted a teenage girl in Queensland and allowed users to post photographs and comments.³² In June 2007, a fight among Brisbane Grammar Schools students, outside the school grounds but while in uniform, was filmed on a mobile phone and uploaded to the Internet.³³

There has been recent media coverage of students using mobile phones or digital cameras to record bullying incidents for the purpose of uploading to the Internet for sharing among friends.³⁴ There is a media report of a 15 year old Brisbane schoolgirl whose profile – apparently viciously fabricated – was posted on a United States website.³⁵ The *Melbourne Age* highlights the plight of a 16 year old girl who received a threatening text message from a classmate and, upon showing it to the school, was reportedly shrugged off by the administrators. She reports becoming reclusive and depressed and found it ‘*scary because I thought I was going to be physically hurt.*’ The girl apparently reported matters to the police who responded quickly but, nonetheless, she moved schools. The girl then began a campaign in the local media to raise awareness of cyber bullying.³⁶

Adolescent psychologist, Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, believes that cyber bullying is an extension of other bullying.³⁷ The increasing use of technology to perpetrate attacks on classmates may be due to the perception of invisibility while online (so a person says things via the Internet that they would never say face-to-face). There is also a degree of physical distance from the victim and an absence of social feedback, thus removing any sense of guilt about the impact of the online

³¹ ‘Cyber intimidation and the art of bullying’, *Age*, 20 November 2007, p 1.

³² ‘Cyber intimidation and the art of bullying’.

³³ ‘Cyber intimidation and the art of bullying’.

³⁴ David Murray, ‘Top school’s “fight club” shame’, *Courier Mail Online*, 17 June 2007.

³⁵ Fiona Purdon.

³⁶ ‘Cyber intimidation and the art of bullying’.

³⁷ Fiona Purdon.

bullying.³⁸ Dr Carr-Gregg says that, these days ‘*you can be the thinnest runt in the world but cause havoc with e-mails and meddle with people’s passwords and e-mail addresses.*’ He also appears to consider that the incidence of cyber bullying is increasing.³⁹

Students besieged by harassing or intimidating text and e-mail messages also find little escape unless they can change their e-mail address and their mobile phone number. Unlike traditional physical or verbal bullying where going home usually offers safety, this form of harassment does not stop at the school gate. If someone is spreading malicious rumours or gossip about a fellow student in a blog or in a chat room, it can be accessed by other classmates overnight. This makes sure that the unfortunate student is the topic of interest at school the next day.⁴⁰

A recent study led by Associate Professor Judy Drennan of the Queensland University of Technology investigated the occurrence of bullying via mobile phones (‘m-bullying’) on 218 high school students.⁴¹ The results of the study suggest that experience of m-bullying is widespread among high school students. Of the 218 respondents, around 38% were male and around 61% were female. Overall, 93.6% of the respondents reported experiencing at least one incident of m-bullying. The researchers had anticipated that females would have experienced more m-bullying than the males but the study found that the boys were, on average, exposed to more m-bullying than the girls.

In terms of distress, the girls were significantly more likely than the boys to be distressed by some incidents and were more concerned about having private information revealed to others, people pretending to be someone they were not, being sent obscene messages, and receiving exaggerated messages of affection. On the other hand, the males were more likely to be distressed by m-bullying that sabotaged their work or their reputation. Boys were more likely to receive obscene or pornographic messages/images and almost twice as likely to receive threats on

³⁸ Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training (Federal Department of Education), ‘Cyber Bullying’, *Fact Sheet*; ‘Bullying No Way!’ website, <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/>.

³⁹ Fiona Purdon.

⁴⁰ Damien Carrick, ‘Young People, Technology and the Law’, *Law Report: ABC Radio National*, 31 October 2006, interviewing Senior Constable Susan McLean, Youth Resource Officer with the Victorian Police.

⁴¹ J Drennan, ‘M-bullying’, *Professional Educator*, 7(1), April 2008, pp 40-41. The study used a cross-sectional mall intercept survey of responses from senior high school students with a mobile phone.

their phones. Interestingly, the girls were much more likely to save any messages and tell a trusted adult about them.⁴²

The study also confirmed other research about the connection between self esteem and wellbeing, finding the existence of such a link in the m-bullying context. The researchers hoped that a better understanding of the impact of m-bullying on young people would assist policymakers to develop intervention strategies.⁴³

Children are often reluctant to report the incidents to parents or teachers, particularly if they feel that their use of their computer or mobile phone might be restricted. There is also some belief among young people that adults cannot stop cyber bullying.⁴⁴ Dr Carr-Gregg urges parents to join their ‘early settler’ children in the online world as quickly as possible and to educate themselves about the technology. It is reported that Dr Carr-Gregg and other experts believe that many children want more adult guidance in this online world and that Dr Carr-Gregg considers that teenagers’ brains are too immature and life experience too limited to realise the long lasting effects of their ‘digital footprint’.⁴⁵ The Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Association has become quite concerned about bullying and cyber bullying and held a forum during April 2008 to allow parents and children to have a say on the issue.⁴⁶

A survey of 588 teenagers, conducted through *Girlfriend* magazine by Dr Carr-Gregg in 2007, found that 76% said they knew somebody who has been bullied or harassed online, 24% said they had been m-bullied, and 27% admitted to having bullied or harassed somebody online. Most of the cyber bullies (87%) did so using SMS texting.⁴⁷ Dr Carr-Gregg believes that the proportion that admitted to cyber

⁴² J Drennan, p 41.

⁴³ J Drennan, p 41.

⁴⁴ Federal Department of Education, ‘Cyber Bullying’, *Fact Sheet*.

⁴⁵ Fiona Purdon.

⁴⁶ Fiona Purdon. See also, ‘Bullying forum’, *City South News*, 17 April 2008, p 3.

⁴⁷ Dr M Carr-Gregg, Senior Constable S MacLean, S Oakes, ‘The Psychological and Legal Challenges for Schools, Parents and the Community, Workshop Paper presented at the National Coalition Against Bullying, Annual Conference, 11 November 2007, <http://www.ncab.org.au/reading.html>, citing Zoomerang Girlfriend Cyber Bullying Survey August – October 2007.

bullying was a significant underestimation because most would not admit doing it.⁴⁸

A survey of 258 teenagers in Melbourne and Sydney, undertaken by the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association in 2005, found that almost one third had received unwelcome calls on their mobile phones and one in 10 said that they had received a threatening SMS or voice message.⁴⁹ Senior Constable Susan McLean from the Victorian Police, who has worked with young people for 14 years, was recently seconded to help Victorian schools address cyber bullying. Senior Constable McLean said that, until around three years ago, there were no significant reports of cyber bullying but it has since become clear that there is a problem with how children were using the Internet. The problem has intensified to the point where reports to police have become daily.⁵⁰

The Federal Department of Education, Science and Training (Federal Department of Education) has fact sheets giving advice to students at the receiving end of cyber bullying and to teachers and parents. The suggestions include the following –⁵¹

- (a) Ensure your mobile phone number is given out only to close friends and family and it is a good idea to have a ‘block’ on your number when calling people you do not know well or do not trust.
- (b) Do not leave your phone where others can access it to find its number.
- (c) Do not respond to an insulting text message or email because a reaction (usually an upset or angry one) is what the perpetrator wants. Rather, keep the message or print out the email or chat room page as a permanent record of the incident.
- (d) Mobile phone companies can help by blocking some numbers getting through to your phone or they can give you a new number.
- (e) Seek help from your school and the police can also be brought in because ‘cyber bullies’ can be charged with various offences. They may also be liable

⁴⁸ Barney Zwartz, ‘Internet bullying warning to parents’, *Sydney Morning Herald Online*, 5 November 2007.

⁴⁹ A Froude, QUIE, ‘Cyber Bullying’, *Independent Education*, 35(2) July 2005, pp 38-39, p 39, citing Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association, ‘Mobile phones and bullying – What you need to know to get the bullies off your back’, 2005, www.amta.org.au. AMTA’s template policy document, *Developing an Acceptable Use Policy for Mobile Phones in Your School*, is available from AMTA on request.

⁵⁰ Bridie Smith, ‘Cyber cop starts Internet beat as bullies run rampant’, *Age Online*, 2 April 2007.

⁵¹ Federal Department of Education, ‘Cyber Bullying’, *Fact Sheet*; ‘Preventing Cyber Bullying in Schools’, *Fact Sheet*. Some websites relating to phone security include www.cybersmartkids.com.au.

in actions for defamation, invasion of privacy or causing emotional distress. Malicious mobile calls can be traced.

- (f) Schools should have a cyber bullying policy in place. Janet Stone, a psychologist and counsellor at a Melbourne girls grammar school, believes that the most effective way of reducing cyber bullying is to involve students as much as possible in developing and implementing policies so that they ‘own’ the ideas about communicating online.⁵² This view was reflected in her experience of forming a focus group of students across all years, at a particular school, to develop a survey to ascertain the extent of the problem and to share their thoughts about cyber bullying. Out of this, gaps in the school policies that needed to be addressed were identified and a new policy was developed, with input from the students. [NetAlert Cyber Safe Schools](#) is an Internet safety program designed to help teachers empower students on safe use of the Internet.⁵³
- (g) It is important that students be made aware that cyber bullying can constitute a criminal offence and that text messages and chat rooms can be traced. Following an incident in May 2006, where two high school students were removed from a New South Wales school for allegedly plotting a massacre, the media reported that the NSW Department of Education sent a directive to all school principals. The directive required principals to periodically warn students over the age of criminal responsibility (10 in NSW) that they can face severe legal consequences if they engage in any activity that is likely to amount to criminal behaviour. This includes using the Internet and mobile phones in an offensive, harassing or menacing way and using mobile phones to film criminal behaviour and then showing the pictures to others. These are serious crimes with severe penalties attached.⁵⁴
- (h) Teachers should ask the website host to remove any malicious information that is posted on a website.
- (i) Teachers should advise parents that home computers are best located in general areas of the house rather than in the child’s bedroom.

⁵² J Stone, ‘Virtual bullying: Managing bullying with technology’, *Professional Educators*, 5(2), May 2006, pp 6-9.

⁵³ See http://www.netalert.gov.au/programs/cybersafe_schools.html.

⁵⁴ Anna Patty and Edmund Tadros, ‘Jail threat to students’, *Sydney Morning Herald Online*, 25 May 2007. The Commonwealth Criminal Code prohibits the use of the telecommunications system (which includes telephones and the Internet) to menace, harass or cause offence and imposes a penalty of a maximum three years in jail.

While many schools do have policies that cover cyber bullying, if the attacks happen outside the school or in the home, then schools tend to advise parents to enlist the help of the police.⁵⁵

As part of the National Safe Schools Week (NSSW) forum in May 2007,⁵⁶ the South Australian Government said that it would seek to improve parent education about cyber bullying because much of it occurred outside the school. When it does, it may be beyond the scope of the schools' Internet filters and school policies about appropriate Internet and mobile phone use. To facilitate this pledge, the South Australian Government will be mailing pamphlets to families about cyber bullying and e-crime, developed in collaboration with the SA Police and the Federal Internet safety advisory body, [NetAlert](#).⁵⁷

Education Queensland has filtering software on school computers. Filters help to manage online access and block inappropriate content. For example, access to the video-sharing site, YouTube, was blocked some time ago when it began to gain popularity.⁵⁸ In March 2007, the Victorian Government banned the YouTube site from its schools. However, there are concerns that rapid changes in technology and the technical sophistication of students might soon overcome the effectiveness of the ban.⁵⁹ It is reported that Education Queensland is working closely with the Queensland Police Service (QPS) to develop strategies for educating students on the effects of cyber bullying. It is also reported that Queensland Catholic school authorities have recently enlisted the help of experts, including Dr Carr-Gregg, to develop policies and guidelines for cyber safety and cyber bullying that have the capacity to keep up with the technology.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ David Murray, referring to comments from Stuartholme principal, Ms Helen Sinclair.

⁵⁶ The National Safe Schools Week (NSSW), an annual event, is an initiative of the Federal Government and is run in collaboration with state and territory governments. It seeks to, among other things, provide a forum for schools to showcase work being undertaken to promote safe and supportive school environments, free of bullying, harassment, violence, abuse and neglect. The inaugural NSSW was held in May 2006.

⁵⁷ 'SA: Cyber bullying tackled at Safe Schools forum', *CCH Headlines online*, 28 May 2007.

⁵⁸ Hon Rod Welford MP, Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts, 'Tough Stance Taken On Cyber Bullying in State Schools', *Queensland Media Statement*, 1 March 2007.

⁵⁹ Bridie Smith, 'Schools ban YouTube sites in cyber bully fight'.

⁶⁰ Fiona Purdon, referring to comments by Queensland Catholic Education Commission Executive Director, Mike Byrne.

It is reported that the Telstra Foundation intends to provide \$2 million in community grants for cyber safety prevention and education programs over the next three years.⁶¹ In partnership with La Trobe University in Victoria and Intuitive Media, Telstra will deliver the SuperClubsPlus program (already operating in Britain) into schools from June 2008 and any school throughout Australia can register. The SuperClubsPlus program is said to provide a ‘*fully protected and mediated online community for primary school children, enabling them to learn cyber safety from an early age.*’⁶²

The former Federal Government’s announcement in May 2007 that it would issue free computer filters to families and libraries has also met with mixed views from education and computer safety experts. The experts were concerned that filters give parents false confidence when, in fact, the technology may quickly be defeated – even by children as young as 12 who are able to overcome the filtering technology.⁶³ It has been claimed that children could get around filters as easily as typing ‘unblock MySpace’ into a search engine.⁶⁴ The executive-director of NetSafe (a New Zealand based cyber safety organisation), Martin Cocker, reportedly argues that filters are only part of the response. He said that educating parents, schools, students and teachers about staying safe online was the answer. When the plans for filters were announced by the then Minister for Communications, Senator, the Hon Senator Helen Coonan, there was mention that an education campaign to help parents and children understand cyber safety issues would be included.⁶⁵

As part of the 2008-2009 Federal Budget, the Federal Government committed \$125.8 million to a comprehensive range of cyber-safety measures over the next four years to attempt to make the Internet safer for children. The initiatives include funding to the Australian Federal Police’s Child Protection Operations Team to allow it to expand its capacity to detect and investigate online child abuse; and tools to empower children to be responsible online participants, as well as

⁶¹ Fiona Purdon.

⁶² Fiona Purdon.

⁶³ Bridie Smith, ‘Cyber filters give “false confidence”’, *Age Online*, 18 May 2007.

⁶⁴ Bridie Smith, ‘Cyber filters give “false confidence”’.

⁶⁵ Bridie Smith, ‘Cyber filters give “false confidence”’.

providing students, parents and teachers with up-to-date online cyber-safety resources and assistance.⁶⁶

At the end of the day, research states that children have to be educated on how to make smart choices about who and what they find in cyber space through effective policy implementation, awareness, supervision, encouragement and peer support systems.⁶⁷ The [NetAlert](#) website provides information and support about safe and responsible Internet use for children, schools and parents.⁶⁸ Suggested technological tactics (noting the above caveats) include applying filtering software to computers and applying monitoring software to track online access.⁶⁹

Dr Carr-Gregg's website has a program called '[I Delete Bullies](#)' which is a free resource to teach young people to delete, block or report bullies.⁷⁰ He also recommends that parents and their children sign a family online contract to set out clear rules about Internet use.

3.2 EMERGING SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

It has been argued that certain forms of bullying tend to be rewarded or legitimised in corporate and sporting contexts – and, particularly, by the media. Television programs such as *Big Brother*, which sometimes contains scenes of housemates verbally attacking each other, and music videos seeming to celebrate bullying behaviour may not be sending the right message to children.⁷¹ Popular movies and cartoons often portray violence and aggressive children appear more likely to

⁶⁶ Senator, the Hon Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, 'Budget provides policing for Internet safety', *Budget Ministerial Media Release*, 13 May 2008. The Communications Minister states that the former Government's Filter Scheme will be closed to new users from 31 December 2008 (due to limited uptake) and the funding redirected to support ISPs making available a 'clean feed' to all Internet points accessible to children.

⁶⁷ A Froude, 'Cyber Bullying', p 39.

⁶⁸ See http://www.netalert.gov.au/advice/risks/cyberbullying/How_do_I_protect_children_from_cyber_bullies.html. Another website suited to school-age children is <http://www.cybersmartkids.com.au/>.

⁶⁹ A Froude, 'Cyber Bullying', p 39.

⁷⁰ 'I delete bullies', *Girlfriend*, 31 October 2007, <http://au.youth.yahoo.com/b/girlfriend/16687/i-delete-bullies/>.

⁷¹ Miranda Divine.

imitate media violence.⁷² Such social and media influences tend to undermine the efforts by governments and schools in tackling bullying.

While there has been some concern raised, as seen earlier in this Brief, about the influence of American ‘Gangsta’ culture on Australian students, Dr Marilyn Campbell, lecturer and psychologist at the Queensland University of Technology, explains that the ‘*Mods, the Rockers and the Beatniks (in the 1950s) had a huge American influence. So I don’t think it’s an incredibly new phenomenon. ... Young people have a seamless online and offline life (now). Bullying happens in both worlds. ... [I]f you look at the five groups [reported to be found among Queensland students], only one-fifth of them identifies more with a violent culture and I would say only one-fifth of that group would practise violence. ... High schools don’t teach violence but TV and the internet and their parents do. ... Schools aren’t the ones to raise children. Parents are supposed to raise them.*’⁷³

There have been reports in the media about parents behaving aggressively towards teachers in relation to matters such as poor results obtained by their child. The unwanted behaviour apparently includes hostile emails, repeated unscheduled visits to the school and, occasionally, physical attacks.⁷⁴ It is possible that the children of these parents would witness such incidents. In June 2007, the media reported that Victorian school principals have asked the Government to introduce laws to protect teachers from parental attacks.⁷⁵ These incidents have been reported to be at their highest level ever and the president of the Victorian Principals Association believes that many teachers do not feel safe at work, with some having had their children threatened and cars vandalised.⁷⁶ In particular, there are reports of parents coming into classrooms and reacting angrily if they feel their child has been bullied by another student or a teacher, and this was particularly troubling in cases where a parent had a substance abuse problem. Countering the accusations is the president of Parents Victoria who believes that a few aggressive parents are giving all parents a bad name and that some have been labelled ‘aggressive’ by the Department of Education for merely being persistent.⁷⁷

⁷² Federal Department of Education ‘National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying’, para 3.4, citing other studies.

⁷³ Paul Weston, quoting Dr Marilyn Campbell, psychologist with the School of Learning, QUT.

⁷⁴ Hannah Edwards, ‘Teachers are bullied – by mums and dads’, *Sydney Morning Herald Online*, 2 July 2006.

⁷⁵ Mark Russell, ‘Parent rage pushing teachers to the edge’, *Age Online*, 10 June 2007.

⁷⁶ Mark Russell.

⁷⁷ Mark Russell.

4 SOME FACTS AND FINDINGS ABOUT BULLYING

School bullying occurs throughout the world, with much of the Australian data reflecting that in other countries. In November 2004, a British national education charity – the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations – released survey results showing that 21% of the 1,682 British parents surveyed said their children had been bullied at school over the past year. Of those children, 57% had suffered verbal attacks while 27% had been physically abused.⁷⁸

Some facts and findings about bullying in the Australian school context are as follows –

- school bullying expert, Dr Ken Rigby, estimates that around 125,000 children do not feel safe at school (although this could be due to more reporting of bullying by parents and children);⁷⁹
- studies examining the prevalence of bullying in Australian schools involving over 38,000 students have found that at least 50% have experienced some form of bullying and around 1 in 6 reported being tormented at least once a week;⁸⁰
- of the telephone calls that the Kids Help Line receive each week about bullying, three out of every four calls are from 10-14 year olds, who are being bullied;⁸¹
- studies across a number of countries, including Australia, England and the United States, have all found bullying to be more common in years 6 to 8 than in years 9 and 10 (although, as discussed later, there are studies indicating that it increases in later years);⁸²
- bullying was the fourth most common reason for teens calling the Kids Help Line in 2002 and accounts for 7.8% of all counselling calls;⁸³

⁷⁸ J James, 'Beating the Bullies', *Time Magazine*, 14 February 2005, pp 44-47, p 46.

⁷⁹ R Higson, p 12, citing Dr Ken Rigby.

⁸⁰ J Martin & R M Gillies, p 195, referring to other studies, including K Rigby, 'What Children Tell Us About Bullying in Schools'.

⁸¹ 'Kids Help Line, *Bullying Information Sheet*.

⁸² J Martin & R M Gillies, p 196, referring to TR Nansel et al., 'Bullying behaviours among US youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285(16), 2001, pp 2094-2100. A different view has been put by K Rigby & B Johnson, 'Expressed Readiness of Australian Schoolchildren to Act as Bystanders in Support of Children who are Being Bullied', *Educational Psychology*, 26(3), June 2006, pp 425-440.

⁸³ Kids Help Line, *Bullying Information Sheet*.

- it appears that some of the most vicious and enduring bullying has been perpetrated upon boys who are seen as, or admit to being, homosexual;⁸⁴
- students who bully others come from every social strata; from happy families as well as from dysfunctional ones;⁸⁵
- many of the children who have called the Kids Help Line about bullying and harassment since the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 have been Muslim children.⁸⁶ An increase in racial abuse in schools has also been noted in a Deakin University study by Associate Professor Fethi Mansouri which also consulted 80 teachers and 44 parents to find that many teachers did not feel equipped to cope with cross-cultural issues in the classroom;⁸⁷
- young people contacting the Kids Help Line identify a variety of reasons for why they believe they are being victimised and these include ethnicity (particularly non-English speaking and Indigenous children); resistance to pressure to behave a certain way; a physical difference; being a high achiever; being new to the school; sexual orientation; and socio-economic background;⁸⁸
- bullying occurs at schools of all sizes, whether they are single-sex or co-educational, or whether they are government-schools or non-government schools.⁸⁹

5 EFFECTS ON VICTIMS OF BULLYING

Various studies have found that students who are bullied by their peers have low self-esteem and difficulty with social adjustment. Those children are also more likely to be absent from school than are other students.⁹⁰ Ability to concentrate at school can be affected, causing grades to drop. Victims of frequent attacks are

⁸⁴ R Higson, p 12.

⁸⁵ R Higson, p 12.

⁸⁶ R Higson, p 12.

⁸⁷ Bridie Smith, 'Study laments school racism', *Age Online*, 5 September 2007.

⁸⁸ Kids Help Line, *Bullying Information Sheet*.

⁸⁹ R Higson, p 12.

⁹⁰ J Martin & RM Gillies, p 196, referring to K Rigby, *New Perspectives on Bullying*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., London, 2002.

more likely than other students to show signs of depression, particularly girls.⁹¹ In some cases, the child may contemplate revenge and feel justified in attacking others.⁹² It is possible, as indicated earlier, that being bullied at school was a factor in some of the school massacre incidents in the USA over recent times.

There are findings that frequent and intense bullying can cause the victim to suffer anxiety, mood disorders, suicidal ideation and, in rare cases, suicide.⁹³ It appears that 40% of suicide victims had been bullied at school.⁹⁴ A terrible example of this occurred in 2003 when a Year 9 student in Victoria, with excellent grades and a black belt in tae kwon do, committed suicide after reportedly being bullied at a school camp.⁹⁵ The former student who (as discussed above) successfully sued the NSW Government in relation to persistent bullying while at school bears the marks of the enduring consequences of the ordeal. Evidence before the court indicated that, at age 18, Ben Cox suffers anxiety and depression, cannot find employment, and is unlikely to form any platonic or romantic relationships.⁹⁶

A *Courier Mail* article covers a 2006 study of 3000 students by Dr Jean Healey of the University of Western Sydney which found that one in five students were a victim of bullying. Dr Healey found that the psychological harm from bullying could be as bad as child abuse (which tends to cover sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect). She also found that those bullied suffered low self esteem and required more psychiatric and clinical assistance later in life.⁹⁷

⁹¹ J Martin & RM Gillies, pp 196-197, referring to two studies by K Rigby including the 2002 study cited above and 'Peer victimisation at school and the health of secondary students', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 22(2), 1999, pp 28-34.

⁹² K Rigby, *Guide for Teachers and Carers on Bullying Among Young Children*, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Crime Prevention Branch, p 5, http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/agd/www/ncphome.nsf/Page/Bullying_Among_Young_Children,.

⁹³ Michael Carr-Gregg (adolescent psychologist), 'More action essential to curb bullying', *Australian*, 16 May 2007, p 14.

⁹⁴ EM Field, 'Bully Blocking – school bullying', <http://www.bullying.com.au/school-bullying/>, citing information from the Victorian Coroner in 2007'.

⁹⁵ R Higson, p 12.

⁹⁶ Michael Carr-Gregg, 'More action essential to curb bullying', *Australian*, 16 May 2007, p 14.

⁹⁷ Jane Fynes-Clinton, 'Escaping the shadow of the bully', *Courier Mail*, 6 September 2007, p 26.

Dr Ken Rigby recently considered world-wide research evidence regarding the mental health of children involved in bullying – whether as a victim or a bully.⁹⁸ Dr Rigby drew the following conclusions after examination of the various studies:⁹⁹

- (a) Numerous correlational studies indicate that being a victim of bullying is a health risk, even those studies that have controlled for level of parental bonding and social support. A variety of tests employing measures of mental health show that frequently bullied students are more likely to suffer low levels of mental health.
- (b) While the existence and nature of causal links has been more difficult to establish, reports based on results from retrospective and longitudinal studies strongly suggest that severe bullying has negative mental health consequences among students from preschool to secondary school.
- (c) It seems likely that deteriorating health associated with bullying is induced by victims being placed continually under stress.
- (d) There is some support for the view that social support from teachers, peers and parents can minimise negative health effects of bullying.
- (e) It is likely that properly implemented anti-bullying programs that reduce levels of peer victimisation in schools could concurrently improve mental health levels but, to the date of reporting (2005), this has not been demonstrated and needs further research.

There has been some opposition to the notion that bullying is harmful to the health of children. Dr Rigby noted, over five years ago, that much of the resistance was from those who assert that being bullied at school never hurt them or, even, did them good because they became tougher for the experience. However, these children, Dr Rigby claims, are often the tough, resilient children. It is the one in ten children who are continually bullied and are affected by it who are of most

⁹⁸ K Rigby, University of South Australia, School of Education, 'Bullying in Schools and the Mental Health of Children', *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, No 15, 2005, pp 195-208. Dr Rigby's examination draws largely upon some **cross-sectional studies** (i.e. studies using questionnaire data at a point in time although this methodology has a weakness in establishing cause and effect), and **correlational studies** (measuring the strength of association between variables, but not necessarily establishing cause and effect – as in whether being bullied at school causes poor mental health). To overcome the deficiencies of those methods, Dr Rigby also considered **retrospective studies** (making use of historical information especially via a questionnaire asking bullied students how they felt about themselves afterwards) and **longitudinal studies** (studies among children over time while at preschool, primary and secondary school. Useful for studying trends and the effects of particular changes). See also, B Abercrombie, S Hill & BS Turner, *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 4th ed, Penguin Books, England, 2000.

⁹⁹ K Rigby, 'Bullying in Schools and the Mental Health of Children', pp 204-205.

concern.¹⁰⁰ In order to effectively counter bullying, and the misery that he has found these children suffer, Dr Rigby emphasises the need for persuasive studies employing longitudinal research designs (monitoring the health of bullied children over a period of time) to indicate that bullying really does cause harm to health. He notes that, in the past, many studies were conducted in such a way that the results could be dismissed as ‘merely correlational’ – for example, to argue that bullying lowers a child’s self esteem might be countered by the view that children with low self esteem are commonly targeted by bullies.¹⁰¹

However, not all students who were bullied at school go on to suffer life-long effects. It is suggested that this could be because those students are able to develop effective coping mechanisms.¹⁰² Those coping methods might be via the employment of certain strategies to reduce stress, taking account of gender and age, including school anti-bullying policies; encouraging peer and other social support; telephone or online support services such as the Kids Help Line, assertiveness training and the other interventions discussed below.¹⁰³

6 THE PERPETRATOR OF THE BULLYING

The literature tends to show that the family is an important influence on the development of bullying behaviour. For instance, research indicates that if the family situation is characterised by harsh and domineering parents who tend to bully their children, those children are more likely to bully others.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, children who regard their families as less cohesive and less caring for each other are more likely to engage in bullying.¹⁰⁵ In his study of mental health associated with bullying in schools, Dr Ken Rigby notes research indicating that low levels of

¹⁰⁰ K Rigby, ‘Does bullying really do children any harm?’ Dr Rigby’s Bullying Pages, <http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/harm.html>.

¹⁰¹ K Rigby, ‘Does bullying really do children any harm?’

¹⁰² J Martin & RM Gillies, pp 204ff.

¹⁰³ J Martin & RM Gillies, p 207.

¹⁰⁴ Federal Department of Education ‘National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying’, para 3.1, citing P Rican, M Klicperova, T Koucka, ‘Families of Bullies and Their Victims: A Children’s View’, *Studia Psychologica*, 35(3), 1993, pp 261-266.

¹⁰⁵ Federal Department of Education ‘National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying’, para 3.1, citing research including L Bowers, PK Smith & V Binney, ‘Perceived Family Relationships of Bullies, Victims and Bully/Victims in Middle Childhood’, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, No 11, 1994, pp 215-232.

parental bonding may be associated with bullying.¹⁰⁶ Generally speaking, it appears that children who bully come from families characterised by neglect, dominance, hostility, and harsh punishment: the children model the conflict resolution style to which they have been exposed, seeing it as the ‘norm’ inside and outside the home.¹⁰⁷

Dr Rigby also suggests that the kind of peers that children have can have an even larger effect than family background. The attitudes towards victims can be an important catalyst and even ‘nice kids’ sometimes pick on certain students because of group pressure.¹⁰⁸

A number of studies around the world indicate that students who frequently bully tend to have high levels of depression and experience higher than average levels of suicidal ideation.¹⁰⁹ Regarding longer term effects, students who bully appear more likely to engage in later criminal behaviour. Disturbingly, there is a 1994 Swedish study finding that 60% of the boys labelled ‘bullies’ in Years 6-9 (ages 13-16) had at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24.¹¹⁰ Moreover, in Australia, it appears that the National Crime Prevention Branch of the Federal Attorney-General’s Department identifies bullying behaviour at school as a risk factor associated with anti-social and criminal behaviour.¹¹¹

An October 2007 Australian Council for Educational Research project found that larger percentages of students who bully others, compared with those who do not bully experience emotional and behavioural problems such as stress, worry, losing

¹⁰⁶ K Rigby, ‘Bullying in Schools and the Mental Health of Children’, p 203, referring to K Rigby, PT Slee & G Martin, ‘The mental health of adolescents, perceived parenting and peer victimisation at school’, Unpublished Manuscript, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Federal Department of Education ‘National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying’, para 3.1, citing research including D Olweus, ‘Bullying at school’ in R Huesmann (ed.), *Aggressive behaviour: Current perspectives*, Plenum Press, New York, 1994; E Ahmed, N Harris, J Braithwaite & V Braithwaite, *Shame Management Through Reintegration*, Australian National University, 2001.

¹⁰⁸ Dr Ken Rigby in R Higson, p 14.

¹⁰⁹ K Rigby, ‘Bullying in Schools and the Mental Health of Children’, pp 202-203, referring to other studies.

¹¹⁰ Federal Department of Education ‘National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying’, para 5.2, citing D Olweus.

¹¹¹ Federal Department of Education ‘National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying’, para 5.2, referring to the NCP’s publication, ‘Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia’, Attorney-General’s Department, Canberra, 1999.

their temper, and drug and alcohol use. A smaller percentage of students who bully (compared with those who do not bully) show positive tendencies such as getting along with teachers and doing the best that they can at school. Further, teachers report that lower percentages of students who bully in comparison with those who do not bully seem able to manage emotions such as anger and depression and frustration and to display social skills such as empathy and making friends.¹¹²

Furthermore, some students who bully are also being bullied by their peers and the mental health of such children has been shown to be especially poor.¹¹³ While this category covers the smallest percentage of all students – with only around 8% of students falling into it – those students are at even higher risk of developing a range of health problems and are often the least likeable and most insecure children at school.¹¹⁴

Evelyn Field, a psychologist noted for her research into bullying behaviours, has observed that many bullies find that their behaviour can interfere with their learning, friendships, work, intimate relationships, income and mental health because of their inability to deal with conflict and violence. They are also more likely to become anti-social adults and are more prone to violence towards their spouse and children.¹¹⁵ A number of longitudinal studies have revealed that children who are violent at school often continue their aggressive and dominating behaviour into later life. It seems also that the form of the bullying changes with life stages – from school bullying to sexual and workplace harassment, to child abuse and domestic violence.¹¹⁶ Of course, not all children who bully are on the road to a life of violence and criminal behaviour, but it seems that these children are the ones most likely to do so.¹¹⁷

¹¹² ME Bernard, A Stephanou, D Urbach, *Australian Scholastic Group Student Social and Emotional Health Report*, ACER, October 2007, p 71.

¹¹³ K Rigby, 'Bullying in Schools and the Mental Health of Children', p 203, referring to some recent overseas studies.

¹¹⁴ Federal Department of Education 'National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying', para 5.3, citing E Amed et al, and other studies.

¹¹⁵ EM Field, 'Bully Blocking – school bullying', referring to other research.

¹¹⁶ Federal Department of Education 'National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying', para 3.1, citing a range of other studies.

¹¹⁷ Federal Department of Education 'National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying', paras 3.1, 5.2, citing B Morrison, *From Bullying to Responsible Citizenship: A Restorative Approach to Building Safe School Communities*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2007 (forthcoming).

7 PEERS

Studies have shown that other students witnessing the bullying rarely take action, particularly if verbal abuse is involved. Around 85% of bullying incidents occur in the presence of peers.¹¹⁸ Reviewing a Canadian video study of school grounds, Dr Ken Rigby believes that if there is some intervention – even just voicing opposition to the bullying – the bullying stops in 50% of cases.¹¹⁹

A study involving 200 late primary and 200 early secondary school students was recently carried out in South Australia. A video of a bullying incident witnessed by classmates was shown to the students. Around 43% of students said they would be likely to help the victim.¹²⁰ Employing multiple regression analysis,¹²¹ the study found that predictors of expressed intention to intervene were: attending primary school, having never or rarely bullied, reportedly having intervened before, having a positive attitude to victims, and believing that parents and friends expected them to help.¹²²

It was suggested that the results showing the willingness of younger students over secondary students to be ready to intervene might be put down to the fact that bullying increases in secondary school and there is more danger of the intervener becoming a victim. It may also be due to an increasing belief that students need to solve their own problems. Another possibility is that secondary schools may constitute less of a community in which people feel obliged to help each other than tends to occur at primary school.¹²³

Given that most bullying incidents occur out of the teachers' sight but in view of other students, the action or otherwise of peers may be important. It has been found that 83% of students report feeling uncomfortable when witnessing such an

¹¹⁸ Federal Department of Education 'National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying', para 3.2, citing WM Craig & DJ Pepler, 'Naturalistic observation of bullying and victimisation on the playground', LaMarch Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution, York University, Unpublished Report, 1997.

¹¹⁹ Dr Ken Rigby in R Higson, p 14.

¹²⁰ K Rigby & B Johnson.

¹²¹ To determine the relationship between a dependent variable (e.g. expectations of others) and independent variables (such as sex and school level): B Abercrombie, et al, *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*.

¹²² K Rigby & B Johnson, pp 436-438.

¹²³ K Rigby & B Johnson, p 438.

incident and they tend to adopt a number of roles – joining in the bullying, cheering, watching on, or, sometimes intervening.¹²⁴

8 NATIONAL SAFE SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK

In 2003, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), comprising federal, state and territory Ministers, developed the *National Safe Schools Framework* (the Framework).¹²⁵ A collaborative initiative of the federal government and state and territory government and non-government school authorities, and other key stakeholders, the Framework provides an agreed national approach to assist schools address bullying and other problematic behaviours.¹²⁶ It incorporates ‘good practice’ found to exist in Australian schools at the time (November 2002). A basic premise of the Framework is that students have a fundamental right to learn in a safe, supportive environment and be treated with respect.

Under the Commonwealth *Schools Assistance Act 2004* (Cth), school funding was made conditional on the Framework being implemented in all schools by 1 January 2006. Its implementation must be reported on for each state and territory through the MCEETYA *Annual National Report on Schooling in Australia*. The Framework and reporting requirements also apply to non-government schools.

The Framework seeks to assist schools in building safe and supportive environments. It is underpinned by guiding principles to counteract bullying, harassment, violence, abuse and neglect, and is accompanied by suggested but non-exhaustive ‘good practice’ approaches to help schools to create and maintain safe and supportive environments.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Federal Department of Education ‘National Safe School Framework: key information from the literature about bullying’, para 3.2, citing some studies including DJ Pepler & WM Craig, ‘A peek behind the fence: Naturalistic observations of aggressive children with remote audiovisual recording’, *Developmental Psychology*, vol 31, 1995, pp 548-553.

¹²⁵ Federal Government, Department of Education, Science and Training, *National Safe Schools Framework*, http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/national_safe_schools_framework.htm#.

¹²⁶ Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Safe Schools Framework Report*, 2003, p 3, http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/resources/natsafeschools_file.pdf.

¹²⁷ *National Safe Schools Framework Report*, p 2. While all these behaviours are covered, only those relating to bullying are considered here.

The Federal Government works with state and territory government and non-government schools sectors through the *Safe and Supportive Schools Committee* on the [Bullying No Way!](#) website. The site contains information about strategies to address bullying, relevant policies and some teaching resources.

During 2004 and 2005, the previous Federal Government provided a \$4.5 million package of initiatives to assist with the implementation of the National Safe Schools Framework. This included funding for teacher professional learning and development and a *Best Practice Grants Program* to highlight and support innovative and effective approaches to safe schools. A sum in excess of \$800,000 was committed to the Framework from 2006, including funding research into bullying and violence in schools.¹²⁸

It also provided funding to the National Coalition Against Bullying (NCAB) to administer the *Best Practice Grants Program 2004-2005* through the Alannah and Madeline Foundation.¹²⁹ The program engaged 171 schools in developing and maintaining safe school environments through various projects and methods. Evaluation of the effectiveness of projects and methods used by the schools indicated positive outcomes with half of all the schools reporting that they had achieved many or all of their goals.¹³⁰ Most reported a significant move towards developing environments that promote and support discussion about bullying and 65% reported that the school culture had significantly or greatly improved or had improve a lot as a result of the project undertaken. Perhaps the biggest achievement found by the schools was a greater awareness of bullying in their school environment and several felt that the project was a catalyst for program and policy review in relation to bullying and behaviour management. Many schools reported that detentions and suspensions had decreased and enrolments had increased as a result of the initiatives and the altered perception of how the school managed bullying.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Hon Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Education, Science and Training, 'Inaugural National Safe Schools Week 2006', Australian Council of State School Organisations Newsflash.

¹²⁹ The Alannah and Madeline Foundation is a national charity keeping children safe from violence. It was established in memory of Alannah and Madeline Mikac, aged 6 and 3, who along with their mother and 32 other people were tragically killed at Port Arthur in April 1996. See <http://www.amf.org.au/>.

¹³⁰ Dr H McGrath, Faculty of Education, Deakin University, 'Making Australian Schools Safer – Summary Report of the Outcomes from the National Safe Schools Framework Best Practice Grants Program (2004-2005)', Federal Department of Education, <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/1DFB8046-12B5-4669-9065-F4FDD8E0A67E/19320/BriefNSSFReportforwebsite.pdf>, p 10.

¹³¹ Dr H McGrath, pp 10-11.

The National Safe Schools Week (NSSW) 2007 was launched by the then Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, on 24 May 2007 accompanied by an announcement of funding of \$200,000 for two research projects into bullying.¹³² The NSSW saw a number of events and activities. These included parent, teacher and student forums to discuss ideas about creating and sustaining safe school environment; various displays of student work; and peer support-type activities.

Among other projects and initiatives undertaken by the Federal Government is a [Guide for Teachers and Carers on Bullying Among Young Children](#) on the premise that research has found that interventions at the preschool and primary school age are the most effective in reducing bullying behaviour.¹³³

9 APPROACHES TO BULLYING

An interesting point coming from the research is that it is only when children feel that they are in a safe environment and will receive the support they need that they will be able to talk to the teacher and their peers about being bullied.¹³⁴

A number of key elements from the Framework about addressing bullying behaviour echo worldwide research regarding the most successful interventions. The seemingly most successful approaches typically include those discussed under the headings which follow.

The information under the headings is drawn from the key elements of the **Framework** (pp 6-10) that schools should have in place to address bullying, and from **research** undertaken by Dr Ken Rigby.¹³⁵

¹³² Hon Julie Bishop MP, 'Howard Government Supporting Safe Australian Schools', *Australian Government Media Release*, 24 May 2007.

¹³³ K Rigby, University of South Australia for Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Crime Prevention Branch, *Guide for Teachers and Carers on Bullying Among Young Children*, http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/agd/www/ncphome.nsf/Page/Bullying_Among_Young_Children, p 2.

¹³⁴ K Rigby, *Guide for Teachers and Carers on Bullying Among Young Children*, p 10.

¹³⁵ K Rigby, *Guide for Teachers and Carers on Bullying Among Young Children*, pp 6ff; K Rigby, 'Bullying in schools and what schools can do about it', Dr Rigby's Bullying Pages, <http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/>.

9.1 ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES

The Framework advocates that all schools develop and implement anti-bullying policy, in consultation with staff, students and parents, clearly stating that the school does not tolerate bullying and setting out guidelines for taking action if bullying occurs. Some experts on bullying consider that the effectiveness or otherwise of a school's anti-bullying policy is related to how well it is implemented.¹³⁶ Dr Rigby comments that anti-bullying policy and programs must be formulated carefully and engage the whole school community so approaches are consistently applied and anti-bullying is part of the curriculum.¹³⁷ The need to take a whole of school approach (involving students, staff and parents) to emphasise that 'bullying is everybody's problem' was an emerging theme of the *Best Practice Grants Program 2004-2005*.¹³⁸

So that teachers, students and parents can work towards an anti-bullying policy and behaviour management plans, teachers themselves have to reach a consensus on a definition of 'bullying' and the sorts of behaviour that amounts to 'bullying.'¹³⁹ For instance, what about non-racial or discriminatory slurs, such as calling a classmate ugly or stupid, or making rude gestures at another student? It has been suggested that teachers talk together to agree on a definition of bullying.

Older students could be involved in the development of the policy by means of an anonymous questionnaire or survey to ascertain the types and extent of bullying at a particular school, and the places where it occurs. Preschool aged children could be engaged by means of an informal discussion. This survey could also gauge how students feel about the problem. Parents can also help in this process by meeting with teachers to discuss their child's relationships with peers.¹⁴⁰ The Framework also notes that parents need to be engaged in whole-of-school planning processes, involved in information sessions (e.g. on bullying and supporting children) and given access to resources on building relationships and on child behaviour.

The Framework suggests that the anti-bullying policy contain a statement of rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community in relation to bullying.

¹³⁶ Michael Carr-Gregg, 'More action essential to curb bullying', *Australian*, 16 May 2007, p 14.

¹³⁷ K Rigby, 'Do interventions to reduce bullying in a school really work?' Dr Rigby's Bullying Pages, <http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/intervention.htm>.

¹³⁸ Dr H McGrath, p 13.

¹³⁹ Anti-discrimination legislation is aimed at protecting adults which is not at all helpful for school-age children.

¹⁴⁰ K Rigby, *Guide for Teachers and Carers on Bullying Among Young Children*, p 6.

The statement should also set out the consequences of unacceptable behaviour together. A behaviour management plan, outlining how the school will address bullying issues, should also be in place.

As positive bystanders can help the situation, anti-bullying policies should include a statement about what witnesses to bullying should do to try to stop it.¹⁴¹ Students should be encouraged to seek help when they are bullied or see it happening to other students, and parents should be encouraged to identify and report bullying issues observed or reported to them.¹⁴²

It is also important that the policy, behaviour plans and procedures are regularly reviewed, including audits of bullying and safety issues, through surveys of staff, students and parents.¹⁴³ The Framework states that an analysis of the evaluation data can inform future planning, needs and practices.¹⁴⁴

9.2 ADDRESSING CYBER BULLYING

Clearly, with emerging cyber bullying incidents, school codes of conduct and anti-bullying plans must embrace this type of conduct, perhaps with a related policy regarding appropriate Internet and mobile phone use. This needs to be backed up by effective supervision and monitoring by staff. The Bullying No Way! website suggests that staff may need to undertake professional development and training to understand the technology and gain insights into the 'world' of cyber bullying for a general awareness about ways to detect, review and intervene. Teachers who are talking with the class about cyber bullying need to motivate safe and responsible behaviour online.

Schools should also provide parents with information about any concerns and about how to keep their child safe while online and how to intervene if cyber bullying has occurred. They should also be made aware of the legal consequences

¹⁴¹ K Rigby, 'What schools can do', Dr Rigby's Bullying Pages.

¹⁴² These matters were also endorsed in the project outcomes of the *Best Practice Grants Program 2004-2005*: see Dr H McGrath, pp 14-15.

¹⁴³ See also Dr H McGrath, p 16.

¹⁴⁴ Schools should also implement risk assessment procedures (e.g. appropriate supervision).

that attach to cyber bullying if it seems that their child is engaging in this activity.¹⁴⁵

9.3 TRAINING FOR TEACHERS

It has been observed, however, that even where there are anti-bullying policies in place, many teachers find it difficult, and are often unprepared, to deal with the issue.¹⁴⁶ The Framework considers that pre-service and in-service training should be provided to all staff about bullying and student management; how best to deal with bullying; and understanding its effect on others.

9.4 TEACHING ANTI-BULLYING STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

The research and the guiding principles from the Framework advocate that all children be taught strategies to deal with bullying as part of the overall curriculum. However, as a basis, it appears to be agreed that all children be encouraged to value the rights of others to learn in a safe environment and to be treated with respect. The Framework suggests that effective and age-appropriate curricula, programs and pedagogy be developed to enable students to use empowering processes that increase safety and help them to problem solve while learning relationship and citizenship skills. The outcome of the *Best Practice Grants Program 2004-2005* projects also indicated the importance of ensuring that the school's policy and programs were reflected in daily practices including the way in which teachers interacted with students, staff and parents and their behaviour management strategies.¹⁴⁷

Dr Rigby comments that success is more likely to be achieved when interventions are used with younger/primary age students and applied thoroughly.¹⁴⁸

As a starting point, teachers can bring about better knowledge of the problem. They can elicit ideas from students, discuss different types of bullying, and attempt to raise empathy levels towards victims through activities such as talking about how such children might feel if they were being victimised.

¹⁴⁵ 'What are schools doing about it?', Bullying No Way!, <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au>. The site also suggests that school curriculum programs teach 'netiquette' to help reduce cyber bullying incidents.

¹⁴⁶ J James, p 46.

¹⁴⁷ Dr H McGrath, p 14.

¹⁴⁸ K Rigby, 'Do interventions to reduce bullying in a school really work?'

To empower students to help them be free of bullying, assertiveness training might be given; they can be taught how to react nonchalantly when appropriate; as well as encouraged to stand up for, and be supportive of, other students. To help students to avoid being the ‘bully’, anger management training, conflict resolution and similar skills can be useful.¹⁴⁹

9.5 RESPONDING TO BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

The National Safe Schools Framework suggests that steps and outcomes for managing bullying incidents needs clear documentation to enable evaluation and allow possible review. The responses to bullying must be consistently applied throughout the school and should be effectively matched to the incident.

The Framework appears to support the approaches and methods explained below by suggesting that students involved in bullying should be provided with support with a focus on restoring wellbeing (e.g. through counselling) and maintaining connectedness with schooling, including the reintegration of those involved in harmful behaviour. It indicates that ‘restorative justice practices’ (explained below) can make the incident an educative opportunity for repairing the harm and fostering more responsible relationships and behaviours that consider other people’s perspectives.¹⁵⁰

Dr Ken Rigby has noted from the research that while there is no standard approach, some suggested ways of dealing with bullying incidents, and the main interventions being used in schools throughout Australia and the world, include those discussed under the following headings.¹⁵¹ Determining the ‘right’ intervention method depends on the seriousness of the bullying. It may be that an informal approach can be used when the bullying is of a low level nature but a more formal approach may be needed when it is a serious incident.

9.5.1 Informal Resolution

For low level bullying incidents, the situation may be resolved by speaking informally with the student who has bullied another and encouraging them to act in a better way, explaining the advantages of doing so and the consequences of not

¹⁴⁹ See also, Dr H McGrath, p 15.

¹⁵⁰ See the Framework Glossary, pp 11-12.

¹⁵¹ K Rigby, *Guide for Teachers and Carers on Bullying Among Young Children*, p 19; K Rigby, ‘How are cases of bullying being handled by schools?’, Dr Rigby’s Bullying Pages.

doing so (possibly suspensions) that are set out in the school's behaviour management plan or school rules.

9.5.2 Mediation

Sometimes the matter can be helped through mediation between the students involved. However, mediation will be inappropriate where it is the perpetrator's behaviour that is the problem.

9.5.3 Restorative Justice Practices

'Restorative justice practices' seek to provide carefully structured ways (usually community conferencing) for students to understand the impact of their actions, recognise their responsibilities, and make amends to those affected.¹⁵² The problem-solving focus, which centres on healing and making things 'right', is a shift from traditional punitive behaviour management approaches.

Specific practices include community conferences which bring together the bullying student and the victim along with their parents and relevant school personnel. A trained facilitator is used to direct questions to the participants about the incident and its impacts on everybody in the effort to reach an agreement. The agreement should comprise some type of restitution and possible ongoing measures, such as counselling and follow up, to ensure that the agreement is complied with.¹⁵³

9.5.4 Method of Shared Concern

The 'method of shared concern' is a Swedish technique which adopts a non-punitive problem-solving approach to dealing with bullying and involves

¹⁵² Some schools have adopted an approach where students engage in role-playing to resolve conflicts with peers and to manage feelings of shame: K Rigby, 'Addressing Bullying in Schools: Theory and Practice' *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, Australian Institute of Criminology, No 259, June 2003, p 5.

¹⁵³ See Victorian Department of Education and Training (VDET), *Safe Schools are Effective Schools Strategy: strategies to intervene in bullying incidents*, <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/safeschools/bullying/intervene.htm>, adapting material from M Armstrong & M Thorsborne, 'Restorative Responses to Bullying', in *Bullying Solutions: Evidence-base Approaches to Bullying in Australian Schools*, Pearson Education, Sydney, 2005.

discussions with the parties involved in the attempt to bring about a resolution.¹⁵⁴ It is not used in highly serious cases of bullying or where criminal penalties might apply. It tends to be employed where students are suspected to be in a group bullying another student.

The ‘suspected bully/ies’ is interviewed but no accusations are made. Rather, the students are asked to help in solving the problem – i.e. asked what they know about the situation and what might be done to improve things. Although trained counsellors can be used, teachers can also use the method if they have the necessary training. Those who use the method tend to find that the students interviewed do acknowledge what has happened and do offer some suggestions (either because they become concerned about the victim and/or they see it as in their best interests to cooperate). After the victim has been interviewed and provided with support, a meeting with the whole group of the suspected bullies is held and, once it is clear that a constructive outcome can occur, a further session can include the victim once he or she has been assured that the perpetrators will cooperate.¹⁵⁵

Dr Rigby observes that while no intervention is completely effective in combating bullying and that errors can occur in employing this particular method, the ‘method of shared concern’ has been incorporated into a number of very successful programs and has helped to reduce bullying in school in England, Scotland and Finland. It has also had reported success in Western Australia. A 2004 study in England found that interventions using this method were successful in around two-thirds of cases.¹⁵⁶ The approach is one that does need a serious investment of time and training and it has to be implemented in an environment of whole-of-school commitment to its value.¹⁵⁷

Objections to the ‘method of shared concern’ are also considered by Dr Rigby. He believes that the criticisms are often based on a misunderstanding of the approach. One major concern of parents whose child has been bullied is that this method is a way of ‘letting off’ the bully. Dr Rigby explains that while parents want to see the bully punished, this can lead to more insidious victimisation of the child that will

¹⁵⁴ K Rigby, ‘The Method of Shared Concern as an Intervention Technique to Address Bullying in Schools: An Overview and Appraisal’, *Australian Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 15(1), 2005, pp 27-34. See also, K Rigby, ‘How are cases of bullying being handled by schools?, Dr Rigby’s Bullying Pages.

¹⁵⁵ K Rigby, ‘The Method of Shared Concern as an Intervention Technique to Address Bullying in Schools’, p 29.

¹⁵⁶ K Rigby, ‘The Method of Shared Concern as an Intervention Technique’, pp 27, 33.

¹⁵⁷ K Rigby, ‘The Method of Shared Concern as an Intervention Technique’, p 33.

be harder to identify as ‘bullying’, whereas this method can ultimately lead to making their child safer.¹⁵⁸

9.5.5 Bystander Training

It was noted earlier that many bullying incidents occur in the presence of others – peers rather than teachers. However, if classmates do nothing, the bullying will probably continue. The concept of bystander training is based on helping students to support victims of bullying, and to intervene where possible. It is acknowledged, however, that students must feel confident to intervene and have the support of staff. Thus, the training should stress that students are expected to do something when observing bullying – either speak up or report the incident to a teacher. The students need to be taught skills to intervene, including when it might be feasible to intervene and when it might be dangerous to do so; what types of action might help rather than inflame the situation; and role playing possible scenarios.¹⁵⁹

9.5.6 The Friendly Schools and Families Program

The *Friendly Schools and Families Program* (hailing from Perth) is evidence based, having been implemented as a scientific research project in a number of Perth primary schools between 2002 and 2004, and then rigorously evaluated. The research helped to identify the components that resulted in the greatest reduction in bullying so that these could form the basis of the *Friendly Schools and Families Program*. The Program is now used in over 800 schools across Australia. It adopts a whole-of-school-community approach to empower teachers, parents and students to respond to bullying. The Program assumes that bullying is not reduced by one approach but by many small moves.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ K Rigby, ‘The Method of Shared Concern as an Intervention Technique’, p 32, citing a personal communication from A Pikas, (developer of the method: see ‘New developments of shared concern method’, *School Psychology International*, 23(3), 2002, pp 307-326), cited in K Rigby.

¹⁵⁹ VDET, ‘*Safe Schools are Effective Schools Strategy: strategies to intervene in bullying incidents*’, adapting material from K Rigby & D Bagshaw, ‘Using Educational Drama and Bystander Training to Counteract Bullying’, in WM Craig et al, *International Journal of School Psychology*, vol 21, 2000, pp 22-36.

¹⁶⁰ Friendly Schools & Families – A bullying reduction program for schools’, <http://www.friendlyschools.com.au>.

The strategies employed by the Program aim to increase understanding and communication about bullying within the school community, provide adaptive responses, promote peer and adult support for bullied children, and promote an ethos of discouragement of bullying behaviour. Family involvement is an important ingredient. Evidence collected from the six year project suggested that children were helped to deal with or cope with the harmful effects of bullying by developing resilience to being bullied. Thus, strategies to build resilience in students, as well as to encourage empathy and self esteem, form an important part of the Program.

Basically, the *Friendly Schools and Families Program* offers practical help, a range of strategies for each component of the Program, and tools to assist in their implementation. Case studies also help to show how other schools have adapted and used certain strategies. Some simple ideas suggested by the Program include that teachers on playground duty wear fluorescent vests so they are more visible to children who might need help in times of trouble and act as a deterrent to bullies.¹⁶¹

9.5.7 Other Programs and Tactics

Some schools have created roles for students to counter bullying. For example, an older student could become a 'buddy' to a younger student or a student could become part of a peer support program whereby they offer help to children who are being bullied. Some older students are even undertaking peer mediation training enabling them to apply conflict resolution skills in resolving clashes that might involve bullying. Some schools have established committees of students from different classes that speak out against bullying at assemblies and other gatherings and offer collective support for students being bullied.

Some schools have invested in 'bully buttons' which students press when they are being bullied. The devices are linked to cameras that record incidents and alert teachers by SMS. As the technology is expensive, few schools have installed it but a Victorian school which installed it in 2005 (costing over \$100,000) reports that parents and students were reassured by the presence of the 'bully buttons' and that the cameras had also helped with medical emergencies or strangers entering the grounds. If a fight occurred, the teachers said that they could get to it almost immediately.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Christopher Jay, 'Help wanted to stop bullying', *Australian Financial Review*, 26 May 2006, p 70. Because the materials are aligned with national targets for reducing bullying in schools, in accordance with the National Safe Schools Framework, they have now commercially available to all schools across the country

¹⁶² Bridie Smith 'Snarl, you're on bully camera as schools act', *Age Online*, 5 December 2007.

9.6 WHAT THE EXPERTS THINK ABOUT HOW SCHOOLS ARE ADDRESSING BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

In looking at the various approaches to combating bullying adopted by schools around the world, it appears that the results vary considerably. The reduction in bullying has only been around 15% on average.¹⁶³ Thus, it may be that, so far, no one intervention is more successful than others.

In May 2007, Dr Rigby told ABC radio that he believes that *‘our practices in schools at the moment are not very effective in reducing bullying. ... I don’t mean simply in Australia, I mean worldwide the so-called experts have not been able to produce the programs that reduce bullying very significantly. About [a] 15% reduction is around the norm ... And so, I think we need to have a good deal more research on what practices work with what kinds of bullying, and far more information about what appears to be working.... [The fact that bullying is not being dealt with effectively] is not because of the inadequacy or the laziness of schools ... it’s simply because ... a lot more work needs to be done to work out what are the best ways of actually dealing with it. ... It’s not enough simply to say we need more discipline...’*¹⁶⁴

The problem, asserts Dr Rigby, is that rigorous evaluations of anti-bullying programs are rare and, when they occur, they often consist of anecdotal evidence and results for which there have not been proper experimental or statistical controls – such as using control or comparison groups. Another difficulty, Dr Rigby points out, is that many evaluations have been undertaken by those involved in the intervention who have an interest – financial or otherwise – in findings of successful outcomes.¹⁶⁵

Adolescent psychologist, Michael Carr-Gregg believes that the problem is actually getting worse.¹⁶⁶ He has said that, while state and territory governments believe that they have measures in place to combat school bullying, his visits to schools across the country have shown that there is considerable disparity in the content and implementation of bullying policies and there are many schools that have no policy to address cyber bullying.¹⁶⁷ Dr Carr-Gregg believes that there needs to be a

¹⁶³ K Rigby, ‘Do interventions to reduce bullying in a school really work?’

¹⁶⁴ Eleanor Hall, ‘No quick fix for school bullying: professor’, *The World Today on ABC Online*, 14 May 2007.

¹⁶⁵ K Rigby, ‘Do interventions to reduce bullying in a school really work?’

¹⁶⁶ Miranda Devine.

¹⁶⁷ Michael Carr-Gregg.

set of national protocols mandated at all schools which ensure adequate implementation.¹⁶⁸

In May 2007, the then Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard MP, delivered the *Australia Rising to the Education Challenge* address to the Centre for Independent Studies in which he said that schools needed to be more accountable so that parents were better able to assess a school's performance.¹⁶⁹ As well as providing parents with school-based test score information, Mr Howard thought that parents should be provided with better information about school discipline, bullying and disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Mr Howard considered that '[p]arents *also are entitled to expect that their child is safe at school...*'. He commented that any information currently available was on an aggregated statewide basis rather than at the child's own school, and what was available tended to be partial and fragmented.¹⁷⁰

In an ABC radio interview, Dr Ken Rigby said that the requirement that schools be more accountable to parents regarding incidents of bullying was '*reasonably good sense*' and that to find solutions there needed to be '*more support or more understanding on the part of parents.*'¹⁷¹ Dr Rigby supported giving parents information about bullying and the nature of any anti-bullying policies the school had developed, as well as involving parents in meetings about the issue. He also considered that if school principals seek to become informed and skilled in dealing with different bullying issues, then greater autonomy, as suggested by Mr Howard, was desirable.¹⁷²

In response, the then Opposition announced that a Labor Government would, if elected, establish, in consultation with the states and territories, a clear and agreed national objective and program to eliminate school bullying.¹⁷³

On the other hand, there are commentators who believe that parents/carers should shoulder some of the responsibility to ensure that the home environment is not one

¹⁶⁸ Michael Carr-Gregg.

¹⁶⁹ Hon J Howard MP, Prime Minister of Australia, 'Australia Rising to the Education Challenge', Transcript of the Prime Minister's Address to the Centre for Independent Studies – The Policy-makers Series, CBA Communications Centre, Sydney, 14 May 2007, p 11.

¹⁷⁰ 'Australia Rising to the Education Challenge', p 11.

¹⁷¹ Eleanor Hall, 'No quick fix for school bullying: professor'.

¹⁷² Eleanor Hall, 'No quick fix for school bullying: professor'.

¹⁷³ Stephen Smith, 'Action Not Words Needed on School Bullying', *Federal Government Media Statement*, 15 May 2007.

in which their children grow into bullies rather than offloading the entire responsibility to the school.¹⁷⁴ Dr Madeline Campbell comments that high schools ‘don’t teach violence but TV and the Internet and [the] parents do. ... Schools aren’t the ones to raise children. Parents are supposed to raise them...’.¹⁷⁵

10 QUEENSLAND’S CODE OF SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR

The [Education Queensland](#) website clearly maintains the Department of Education, Training and the Arts’ non-tolerance of bullying and states that school communities are working to make schools safer and more supportive and respectful for all young people.¹⁷⁶ The National Safe Schools Framework is being implemented on a statewide basis, including regional forums and the funding of district and school projects.¹⁷⁷

In 2006, the Queensland Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts, the Hon Rod Welford MP, introduced the [Code of School Behaviour](#) which requires all schools to implement a [Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students](#) in accordance with Education Queensland guidelines and policies on bullying.¹⁷⁸ These proposals are part of the Queensland Government’s \$3 million ‘Better Behaviour, Better Learning’ initiative. During the 2006-2007 financial year, new student report cards were introduced, designed to provide parents with consistent reports for students in Years 1 to 10, rating student achievement, behaviour and effort using an A to E scale.¹⁷⁹

The *Code of School Behaviour* defines the responsibilities of all members of the school community and outlines a consistent standard of behaviour for all state schools in Queensland, inclusive of students, staff and parents. It is based on a

¹⁷⁴ Miranda Divine.

¹⁷⁵ Paul Weston.

¹⁷⁶ Queensland Government, Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Education Queensland), ‘Bullying and Harassment’,
<http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/protection/community/bullying.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Education Queensland, ‘National Safe Schools Framework’,
<http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/behaviour/resources/nssf.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Education Queensland, *The Code of School Behaviour*,
<http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/production/reports/pdfs/code-school-behaviour-a4.pdf>.

¹⁷⁹ Years 1 to 3 will be rated in a different way: Queensland Government, ‘Ministerial Portfolio Statement – Department of Education, Training and the Arts’, *Queensland State Budget 2007-2008*, p 1-15.

recognition of the close relationship between learning, achievement and behaviour and upon a notion of respect. Schools have to detail particular strategies to promote appropriate behaviour as well as consequences for unacceptable behaviour in their *Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students*.¹⁸⁰

The *Code of School Behaviour* states that student behaviour that does not comply with the expected standards is not acceptable and that the [Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students](#) will set out the range and level of consequences accordingly. These Plans are developed by the school principal in consultation with staff, students and parents and approved by Education Queensland's chief executive. The school principal is also responsible for the Plan's implementation and for ensuring it is reviewed at least every three years. The Plan should be given to parents and students on enrolment.¹⁸¹ When formulating the Plan, the school beliefs about behaviour and learning should be aligned to the *Code of School Behaviour* and reference can be made to values and principles in the National Safe Schools Framework and similar sources.

In essence, a school's Plan establishes the ways the school will help the students behave responsibly and adhere to the school rules and sets out the consequences for breaking them.¹⁸² In most cases, the legislative changes have meant that state schools have had to revise their existing plans to ensure compliance with the new Code and better consistency in the approach to student discipline across the state.¹⁸³

It is expected that a common *Code of School Behaviour* across all schools will reassure parents transferring their child to another school that the standard of behaviour applying at the old school also applies at the new school.¹⁸⁴

Section 168 of the [Education \(General Provisions\) Act 2006 \(Qld\)](#) introduces the concept of 'enrolment agreements'. Prior to a student being enrolled at a school, the principal must give an enrolment agreement to the parents or, if appropriate, the student, and they will be asked to sign it. The agreement sets out the rights and

¹⁸⁰ This is backed by ss 275-282 of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (Qld)* that requires all state schools to have an approved behaviour plan.

¹⁸¹ A template *Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students* is located at <http://education.qld.gov.au/studentsservices/behaviour/bm-plans.html>. Section headings are mandatory but appendices can be adapted to reflect the school context.

¹⁸² Education Queensland, *Schools and Parents Magazine*, Issue 2, 2006, p 7.

¹⁸³ Education Queensland, 'New behaviour standards set', *Education Views*, 15(3), 17 February 2006, p 1.

¹⁸⁴ Education Queensland, 'New behaviour standards set'.

obligations of parents and staff at the school and requires adherence by all parties to the *Code of School Behaviour*.

The values and principles upon which the Code is based provide that the standards of expected behaviour are linked to transparent, accountable and fair processes, interventions and consequences. The range of approved consequences for unacceptable behaviour includes suspensions, exclusions and cancellations of enrolments, but only after other responses have been considered. During suspensions, principals must ensure that students have schoolwork to complete and should also contact a parent(s) about the behaviour leading to the suspension. If a suspension is longer than five days, the principal must take reasonable steps to meet the parent(s) to discuss the matter. Principals can impose a behavioural improvement condition – for up to three months – as an alternative option to exclusion so that the student can remain at school if they comply with the condition. A breach can result in exclusion. In applying consequences, individual circumstances of the student are taken into account along with the needs and rights of the school community.¹⁸⁵

The Department of Education's *Annual Report 2006-2007* indicates that between the third term of 2006 and the second term of 2007, 126 students received exclusions and 676 received long suspensions (6-20 days) for 'persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others'. 252 students were excluded for 'physical misconduct' while 1,410 received long suspensions.¹⁸⁶ Queensland Teachers' Union president, Steve Ryan, is reported to have commented that more schools were willing to suspend or expel violent students than in previous years but that schools '*could go further*'.¹⁸⁷

In September 2007, the *Sunday Mail* reported that students who had kept diaries of bullying incidents to help staff deal with the effects on children had shown the newspaper some of the entries. It is reported that these included students being spat on while another reported being prodded with steel spikes and suffering a leg wound. It was also reported that parents had become frustrated and had warned teachers that they would go to the police as the penalties for such behaviour were not strong enough.¹⁸⁸ In April 2008, the parents of a girl who was apparently bullied by a female classmate narrowly escaped a prison term after confronting and

¹⁸⁵ Education Queensland, *Code of School Behaviour*. Rights of appeal apply in cases of long suspensions and exclusions.

¹⁸⁶ Department of Education, Training and The Arts, *Annual Report 2006-2007*, p 239.

¹⁸⁷ Renee Viellaris, 'Schools target violence – Expulsion levels soar', *Courier Mail*, 27 November 2007, p 9.

¹⁸⁸ Paul Weston, 'Schools log attacks to beat bullies', *Sunday Mail*, 9 September 2007, p 33.

reportedly attacking the classmate. It is reported that the attack on the girl came after the parents told the school and police about the incidents involving their daughter but had been frustrated when it seemed that neither appeared to act on the complaints.¹⁸⁹ It is also reported that an Education Queensland spokesman said that the Department took bullying very seriously and schools must have responsible behaviour plans on the issue.¹⁹⁰

Resources and professional development programs that support the Government initiatives include a 'Better Behaviour Better Learning' professional development online course for teachers, allowing them to come together to share experiences and learn about behaviour theories and what strategies work best. In addition, ten guidance officers were employed during 2006 to work with challenging students. In December 2005, the Minister for Education said that six new Positive Learning Centres would open in 2006 to bring the number up to 11. These centres offer intensive educational support for students whose behaviour is disruptive in a mainstream environment.¹⁹¹ The 'School-wide Positive Behaviour Support Program, aimed at improving social and academic student outcomes and promoting respectful school cultures, expanded to take in 113 schools in 2007.¹⁹²

Education Queensland manages the [Bullying No Way!](#) website on behalf of Australia's government and non-government education authorities. The site provides resources of state and territory schools' approaches to dealing with bullying, and allows for the sharing of ideas that actually work.¹⁹³

While independent non-state schools are not covered by the *Code of School Behaviour* and the *Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students* requirements, behaviour management policies, including anti-bullying strategies, have been developed in many of those schools.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Tony Keim & James O'Lean, 'Taught a Lesson – vigilante parents bashed daughter's school tormenter', *Courier Mail*, 17 April 2008, pp 1-2.

¹⁹⁰ Tony Keim & James O'Lean.

¹⁹¹ Education Queensland, 'Minister signals new behaviour approach for State schools', *Education Views*, 14(22), 2 December 2005, p 1.

¹⁹² Department of Education, Training and The Arts, *Annual Report 2006-2007*, p 38.

¹⁹³ Education Queensland, *Education Views*, 30 March 2007, pp 8-9. The website is <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/default.shtml>.

¹⁹⁴ 'Independent schools look to improve student behaviour', *Independent Schools Queensland Media Release*, 26 October 2006.

11 EXAMPLES OF POLICIES AND OTHER INITIATIVES IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Many schools throughout Australia have implemented a myriad of initiatives both prior to, and in response to, the Federal Government's National Safe Schools Framework requirements. During the formulation of the Framework, reasonably consistent approaches among government and non-government authorities to countering bullying in schools were apparent. As noted earlier, Federal Government funding is conditional on the Framework being implemented in all government and non-government schools by 1 January 2006.

However, there are far too many programs and initiatives to canvass them all here. The following headings provide a mere overview of responses to bullying in other Australian jurisdictions – whether through anti-bullying policies, plans, procedures and similar documents, and/or through practical programs and approaches.¹⁹⁵ It needs to be noted also, that each state and territory's education authorities engage specialist teachers, guidance officers, counsellors, chaplains, departmental support staff and other professionals to work with students.

In addition, a large number of non-government schools have policies and programs in place aimed at managing student behaviour, in line with the National Safe Schools Framework requirements, and school boards are active in obtaining parent and community involvement. Given that the various state government education authorities' policies are directed at government schools, the primary focus will be on government schools' policies and initiatives.

11.1 NEW SOUTH WALES

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) has a website, '[Bullying: Who Needs It!](#)' linking to a range of anti-bullying programs in NSW schools.¹⁹⁶ DET therefore encourages schools to develop locally-based strategies to combat bullying as part of each school's implementation of the [Student Welfare Policy](#). This Policy provides a framework for anti-bullying programs in NSW schools.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Supported by the various Education Acts in those jurisdictions.

¹⁹⁶ NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), 'Bullying: Who Needs It!' <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/antibullying/>.

¹⁹⁷ DET, Student Welfare, Good discipline and Effective Learning: Student Welfare Policy, https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_serv/student_welfare/stude_welf/pd02_52_student_welfare.pdf.

The Policy seeks to promote the well-being and safety of students to facilitate effective learning and has outcomes and objectives relating to, among other things, a positive climate and good discipline. To achieve this, schools must have policies and procedures to protect the rights, safety and health of the school community. The Policy seeks to maximise students' participation in decision making.

The [Anti-Bullying Plan for Schools](#) document complements each school's welfare and discipline policies and must be implemented by every school.¹⁹⁸ The document contains the requirements for dealing with bullying and sets out the operational guidelines and a framework for schools to use in establishing their own Anti-Bullying Plans.

The [Anti-Bullying Plan for Schools](#) document states that each school's Anti-Bullying Plan must include a clear statement that bullying (broadly defined) is not acceptable and is taken seriously by teachers, students, parents and the wider school community. It also sets out a number of other requirements for the Plans and gives examples for most of these. Among other things that must be included are strategies to prevent bullying (such as teaching skills leading to elimination of bullying), and deal with bullying (such as needing to deal with it quickly and effectively), and for providing clear procedures for reporting bullying, intervening, seeking support and so on. The range of options to deal with bullying should be linked to the School Discipline Code. They include detention, counselling, escalating to suspension and expulsion.

A number of resources to help schools in developing anti-bullying programs can be found on DET's [Anti-Bullying](#) website.¹⁹⁹

A number of NSW government schools have programs in place that various evaluations indicate are proving effective in reducing bullying behaviours.²⁰⁰ For example, one school has adopted the following program comprising:

- **whole-of-school strategies** which involve surveying bullying behaviours; contracts to be signed by students and their parents agreeing that the school has

¹⁹⁸ DET, Anti-Bullying Plan for Schools, https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_serv/discipline/stu_discip_gov/implementation_3_PD20060316.shtml.

¹⁹⁹ An example being *Taking Action, Keeping Safe: a resource for student leaders to counter bullying*, <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/studentsupport/studentwellbeing/antibullying/takingaction.pdf>.

²⁰⁰ The examples can be accessed from the 'programs' button at the top of the [Anti-Bullying](#) website.

zero tolerance to bullying; a clear discipline policy stating what happens to bullies; encouraging students to report bullying;

- **classroom strategies** where the bullying surveys are discussed before and after they are undertaken; ‘buddy’ class activities; and training in anti-bullying and strategies;
- clear **procedures for dealing** with bullying where the student’s name is recorded and three recordings leads to a detention and contacting the student’s parents. If the student receives three detentions, all privileges are taken away and counselling is given. Violence results in instant detention at the principal’s discretion;
- an **evaluation** of the program has found a definite decrease in bullying incidences (and even the initial survey intended merely to gauge the extent of the problem caused a radical change in some persistent behaviours). More students are being assertive in dealing with bullying as they know that it is not tolerated at the school.²⁰¹

Other schools have programs which include surveys mapping safe and unsafe areas of the school (these can indicate hidden corners where harassment may occur and thereby allow more directed teacher supervision of the playground); specific lessons on bullying; older students ‘buddying’ younger ones; support for the victim and for the bully; and help for teachers.²⁰²

11.2 VICTORIA

The Victorian Department of Education and Training’s [Anti-Bullying Policy](#) requires bullying behaviour in schools to be addressed as part of a school’s duty of care to provide a safe and supportive school environment for students to learn in. The Department emphasises that school safety is not viewed as a separate policy but as central to the concept of an effective school.²⁰³ The Policy was part of the Victorian Government’s response to a 2005 review of school anti-bullying policies and strategies. The Department also considers that an important characteristic of a safe and effective school is accountability so that schools regularly self-monitor levels of bullying and review and refine their anti-bullying policies accordingly.

²⁰¹ The Newport Public School anti-bullying program.

²⁰² DET [Anti-Bullying](#) website.

²⁰³ Victorian Department of Education and Training (VDET), ‘Safe Schools are Effective Schools; <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/safeschools/bullying/antibullypol.htm>.

Further, they must implement mechanisms for engaging feedback and for enabling students to ask for help from teachers.²⁰⁴

The Anti-Bullying Policy requires schools to develop and implement, through a process of school community consultation, a [Student Code of Conduct](#) which must include specific anti-bullying strategies and sanctions. The Code must be provided and explained to students, parents and staff and all are required to support its implementation. A copy of the Code and the *Student Discipline Procedures 1994* (incorporated into the Code), should be made available to parents.²⁰⁵

The Department's [Safe Schools are Effective Schools Strategy](#) was published in May 2006.²⁰⁶ The document includes strategies for helping students to deal with bullying and a number of prevention and intervention approaches currently used in Victorian schools, many of which were considered earlier in this Brief. Examples are assertiveness training for students, training bystanders to speak up, buddy systems, and restorative practices. The Department recommends that any prevention/management programs first be critically evaluated before being implemented to ensure that they are sound, unbiased and evidence based.²⁰⁷ The Strategy provides case studies of a number of schools which have been considered examples of 'good practice'.²⁰⁸

In March 2006, the Government banned access by students to the YouTube website and schools' Codes of Conduct will have to include ways of addressing cyber bullying.²⁰⁹ In November 2007, the Victorian Education Minister announced that all Government schools would be provided with updated advice and strategies on cyber bullying and cyber safety. In particular, the Department's [cyber bullying](#)

²⁰⁴ VDET, Student Wellbeing Branch, *Safe Schools are Effective Schools*, <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/SafeSchoolsStrategy.pdf>.

²⁰⁵ VDET, *Guidelines for Developing the Student Code of Conduct*, <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/conduct.pdf>.

²⁰⁶ See <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/SafeSchoolsStrategy.pdf>.

²⁰⁷ VDET, *Safe Schools are Effective Schools*, p 11. It also provides strategies for parents of the child being bullied or if the child is bullying others (pp 15-17).

²⁰⁸ VDET, Student Wellbeing, Safe Schools, <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/safeschools/bullying/index.htm>.

²⁰⁹ Bridie Smith, 'Law "lags behind" cyber bullying', *Age Online*, 17 May 2007.

website requires that schools raise awareness about the criminal offence of cyber bullying under relevant state and federal laws.²¹⁰

11.3 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Western Australian Department of Education and Training's *Behaviour Management in Schools Policy* requires schools to implement an effective Behaviour Management Plan, developed in consultation with students and parents, to ensure that students can learn in a safe and welcoming environment.²¹¹ The Behaviour Management Plan has to include a School Code of Conduct developed in partnership with the school council. In addition, the Plan must outline how acceptable behaviour standards will be established and maintained, and the consequences of breaching the School Code of Conduct. Strategies to prevent harassment and bullying must be included. Review mechanisms must also be stated.²¹²

In a reply to a question in Parliament, the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon Mark McGowan MP, said that the Behaviour Management Plan had been reported on by the teaching profession as an amazing success and something that other states should copy.²¹³ The Minister also commented that there has been a range of anti-bullying initiatives introduced in various schools throughout the State. These have included a curriculum-based program developed by researchers at the Edith Cowan University and aligned with national targets for reducing bullying. In a March 2008 media statement, Mr McGowan said that cyber bullying would be targeted as part of the State Government's zero tolerance approach to bullying and bad behaviour at public schools and that the Government would contribute \$400,000 to a world-first five year long study into cyber bullying. It is intended that the study would monitor thousands of students' use of electronic

²¹⁰ See <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/safeschools/bullying/cyberbullying.htm>.

²¹¹ Western Australia, Department of Education and Training, *Behaviour Management in Schools* (effective 1 July 2001), http://policies.det.wa.edu.au/our_policies/ti_view?uid=deb58b0b4b3124d00f49657279a61861&iview=summary_view. There are a number of other departmental policies, procedures and plans that support the implementation of behaviour management in schools.

²¹² In addition, teachers are required to develop and implement an individual student behaviour management plan when a student needs to modify his or her behaviour and it must set out what strategies will be used to achieve this. Parents are to be informed and engaged in this process.

²¹³ Hon M McGowan MP, Minister for Education, State Education System: Bullying, Questions Without Notice, *WA Legislative Assembly Hansard*, 15 May 2007, pp 2151c - 2152a / 1.

technology and social networking to obtain information needed to develop an intervention program.²¹⁴

11.4 TASMANIA

Tasmania's Department of Education has a [Supportive School Communities Policy Framework](#) which requires each school to have a Disciplinary Policy. The Disciplinary Policy must outline unacceptable behaviour and disciplinary measures available. Among the types of 'unacceptable behaviours' are those which disrupt or affect other students' learning or are likely to be detrimental to the health, safety or welfare of other students or of staff.

To support the Policy, each school has a Behaviour Support Plan – based on rights and responsibilities – enabling staff and students to work together to develop rules to protect the rights of each person and establishing a range of consequences for those who do not accept their responsibilities.²¹⁵ Those consequences may include disciplinary sanctions such as detention. More extreme behaviours may result in suspension, exclusion or expulsion. Schools have to report on the Policy and Plan in their annual school reports.

Most schools have anti-bullying programs, including the use of playground mediators, peer support programs, and preventative programs targeted at students regarded as being at risk of bullying. An example of the latter is identifying boys from abusive homes and teaching them anger management.²¹⁶ Social skills and conflict resolution form part of the curriculum or are part of specific programs.

To promote positive student behaviour, many schools have adopted a Positive Behaviour Support program alongside the normal curriculum. The program helps schools to shift their focus from punishment to teaching students 'what to do'. Key components include school-based teams, the collection of information from students, staff and parents to find out what works and what does not and using this

²¹⁴ Hon M McGowan MP, 'Cyber bullying crackdown', *Media Statement*, 9 March 2008. The Minister said that the study would be headed by national child behaviour expert, Prof Donna Cross from Edith Cowan University and would involve forums for parents and schools and an online student, parent and teacher survey.

²¹⁵ Tasmania, Department of Education, 'Unacceptable Behaviour', <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/parents/attending/behaviour>.

²¹⁶ Hon PC Wriedt MHA, Minister for Education, 'Bullying in Schools', Motion, *Tasmanian Legislative Assembly Hansard*, 23 November 2005, pp 69-82, pp 77-80.

information to develop action plans and evidence-based strategies. Schools receive professional and other support to implement the program.²¹⁷

In May 2006, the then Minister for Education, the Hon David Bartlett MHA, released the Atelier Learning Solutions report on school bullying. During questioning in Parliament, Mr Bartlett said that the report indicated that where schools, parents, students and communities work together on positive rather than punitive approaches to bullying, this had the greatest impact on reducing the problem. It was noted that many models of this kind that were considered to be national best practice were already operating in many Tasmanian schools.²¹⁸ During questioning by a Parliamentary Estimates Committee in June 2007, Mr Bartlett reported that suspensions due to bullying or physical harassment of a student had decreased over the past few years with 286 suspensions in 2006, compared with 345 in 2004 and suggested that the programs he had introduced were having an impact.²¹⁹

11.5 AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

The Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training's *Safe Schools Policy Framework* is designed to provide clear guidelines to ACT government schools for positive student management. The recently developed [*Countering Bullying, Harassment and Violence in ACT Public Schools Policy 2007*](#) requires each school to develop anti-bullying procedures and implement practices and programs designed to ensure that students are protected from bullying, harassment and violence.²²⁰ The procedures must be available to all students and parents. There is a mandate to report instances of bullying, harassment and violence to the Director of Schools immediately and for schools to keep statistical records of the instances.

²¹⁷ Tasmania, Department of Education, 'Promoting Positive Behaviour', <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/educators/support/positivebehaviour>.

²¹⁸ Hon D Bartlett MHA, Minister for Education, 'Bullying in Schools', Question Time, *Tasmanian Legislative Assembly Hansard*, 1 June 2006, pp 16-17.

²¹⁹ Hon D Bartlett MHA, Minister for Education, Estimates Committee A, *Tasmanian Legislative Assembly Hansard*, 21 June 2007.

²²⁰ Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, *Countering Bullying, Harassment and Violence in ACT Public Schools Policy 2007*, http://www.det.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/17608/CounteringBullyingHarassment.pdf.

The school procedures must include strategies for reporting bullying incidents by students, parents and school staff; intervention by students, parents, teachers and other school staff; accessing assistance; and professional learning for teachers and school staff. Procedures must be regularly reviewed and improved, if required. Schools can select any of a number of approaches to address bullying, including restorative practices, social skills programs to address respectful relationships and appropriate behaviour, peer mediation and countering-bullying programs.²²¹

In March 2008, the Department's [Code of Conduct](#) was launched, outlining the responsibilities of community members, staff and students to promoting appropriate and positive conduct and to prevent or minimise aggressive behaviours. The Code links directly with the abovementioned Policy.²²²

11.6 NORTHERN TERRITORY

The [Safe Schools Northern Territory Framework](#) promotes a safe and supportive learning environment for staff and students. It comprises the [Safe Schools NT Code of Behaviour](#), which was launched as part of the National Safe Schools Week on 1 June 2007. The Code required schools to implement or revise their school-based [Wellbeing and Behaviour Policy](#) by the end of 2007.²²³

The Code of Behaviour sets out the rights and responsibilities of students, parents, and all school community members. It outlines the types of behaviours that are not acceptable and are likely to lead to suspension and these include physical and verbal abuse, intimidation and threats, cyber bullying, and harassment.

The Code of Behaviour provides that the range and level of consequences for unacceptable student behaviour are set out in each school's *Wellbeing and Behaviour Policy*. These consequences must provide the opportunity for all students to learn, assist students behaving unacceptably to take responsibility for their actions, and ensure the safety of others. The consequences may include –

²²¹ 'Anti-Bullying Expert to Lead Teacher Workshops', ACT Department of Education and Training, *Media Release*, 22 October 2007.

²²² The Act Government recently established a [Safe Schools Taskforce](#).

²²³ Northern Territory, Department of Employment, Education and Training (Department of Education), *Safe Schools NT Code of Behaviour*, http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/safeschools/docs/safe_schools_code_of_behaviour.pdf. There is a Guideline to the *Wellbeing and Behaviour Policy* each school must have by the end of 2007 at http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/safeschools/teachers/school_wellbeing_behaviour_policy/docs/SSNT_policy_guidelines.pdf.

taking into account individual circumstances, the actions of the students and the needs of others – mediation, restorative processes, detentions, time outs, and suspensions.

To assist teachers in communicating with students and teaching them various skills, Professional Learning modules have been developed. School principals must support teachers in complying with the NT Code and the school's policy by facilitating professional learning to improve skills of staff. Principals are responsible for ensuring that data relating to behaviour and other outcomes is collected. Teacher [tip sheets](#) and useful resources are also provided on the Department's website. During 2008, the NT Government is unveiling a territory wide Reducing Bullying and Empowering Bystander Package and Wellbeing and Behaviour Officers will assist schools in introducing the topic to students.²²⁴

11.7 SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) created the [School Discipline Policy](#) in 1996 (updated March 2007) which has to be implemented by all SA schools.²²⁵ The aim of the Policy is, among other things, to create safe, orderly, productive and successful learning communities free of bullying and harassment. As in other states and territories, each school has to have a *Behaviour Code* stating the school's expectations of student behaviour and a range of consequences for bad behaviour, including suspension or exclusion in more extreme cases. Schools may ask parents and students to sign an acknowledgment of the school's *Behaviour Code* as part of the enrolment process. In addition, the Code must be regularly reviewed.²²⁶

In 2005, the SA Government announced a *Coalition* to decrease bullying, harassment and violence in all SA schools. Members include university academics who lead the field in research about bullying, such as Dr Ken Rigby and Dr Philip Slee. Other members include representatives from Catholic and Independent schools, and officers and Directors from DECS. The *Coalition* advises the DECS

²²⁴ NT Department of Education, News 2008,
<http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/safeschools/news/>.

²²⁵ Guided by an Implementation Kit issued by the DECS.

²²⁶ South Australia, Department of Education and Children's Services, *School Discipline Policy*, updated 1 March 2007,
<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/SchoolDisciplinePolicy.pdf>.

about strategies to reduce bullying behaviours.²²⁷ A number of initiatives are being introduced following on from the Safer SA Schools Conference: *Meeting the Challenges of Bullying*, organised by the *Coalition* in June 2006.

To assist in progressing various programs, a Wellbeing Unit has been established within DECS to advise schools, parents and government bodies about bullying and to develop networks among schools and other relevant bodies and universities. Various resources are available to schools from DECS, an example being a DVD – *Reducing Bullying: Evidence Based Strategies for Schools* aimed at secondary students not just in SA but also in other jurisdictions. It features some short videos of voices of students, teachers, parents and relevant experts that give information and strategies to deal with bullying.²²⁸

12 ROLE OF PARENTS

So what can parents do to find out whether or not their son or daughter is a target of physical or psychological bullying at school? Children can be reluctant to tell their parents that they are suffering from abuse at school. It may be very hard to tell that it is occurring as it is usually carried out beyond the sight of teachers. The victimised child may feel weak and ashamed – or frightened that ‘dobbing’ may make matters worse.²²⁹

Some of the warning signs that parents can look for include –²³⁰

- the child feigning an illness and asking to be kept home from school;
- the child not wanting to go to school alone;
- regularly losing money;
- unexplained injuries and arriving home with damaged clothes or books;
- changes in behaviour such as crying, having nightmares and acting aggressively.

The literature indicates that if a child tells anyone, it is more likely to be their friends or their parents before they would approach a teacher. However, even to

²²⁷ South Australia, DECS, ‘Bullying and Harassment webpage’, <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/speced2/default.asp?navgrp=default&id=a25792>.

²²⁸ Hon J Lomax- Smith MP, Minister for Education & Children’s Services, ‘*Helping schools to eliminate bullying*’, *Premier & Cabinet of SA News*, 21 February 2007. Other DECS initiatives include highlighting cyber bullying.

²²⁹ Federal Department of Education, ‘Bullying: Information for Parents’, *Brochure for Parents*.

²³⁰ Taken from R Higson, p 14.

talk to parents is a difficult step and usually one where all other avenues to stop the bullying have failed. For a child to talk to his or her parents there has to be a feeling that he or she will be listened to and believed; that parents will handle it sensitively; and will allow the child some control over what is happening.²³¹

The reaction of parents is important. It has been suggested that parents do not advise the child to ‘just ignore’ the bully or to ‘hit back’ as these tactics rarely work.²³² Even more troubling is the opposite reaction where the parents blame the child or make the child think the issue is not important. It is not helpful for the victimised child if the parents become angry and accuse students and other people without knowing all the facts. Many parents do become angry – which is quite understandable – and want to go to the school to have the matter sorted out immediately.²³³ However, the child may not want the parents to involve the school immediately in case matters are made worse. Thus, the experts advise that, initially, it is best to allow the child to talk the matter through so all the facts are elicited, and for parents to keep an open mind. Then, after gentle questioning, help the child find a possible approach for the parents or child to take. This might be to make contact with the school principal, welfare officer or chaplain.²³⁴

The experts indicate that when the parents make contact with the school, the information should be presented as calmly as possible and in a way that makes it clear that the parents see themselves as a partner in trying to find a solution. It is also important to ask about the school’s anti-bullying policy. Then, assuming that the parents have told the school what they and their child would like done, the school will need time to investigate and talk to anyone else who might be able to help or may have witnessed the incidents. Parents should then arrange to make follow-up contact with the school.²³⁵

As a general rule, it is important for parents to support the child and help him or her to develop confidence and to enlist the assistance of a teacher if he or she feels threatened at school.²³⁶ It is essential for the child to understand that there is a

²³¹ Federal Department of Education, ‘Bullying: Information for Parents’, *Brochure for Parents*, drawing on K Rigby, ‘Bullying in Schools and What to do About It’, *Australian Council for Educational Research*, Melbourne, 1996.

²³² M Lemonick, p 49, referring to work by S Limber, Clemson University.

²³³ Federal Department of Education, ‘Bullying: Information for Parents’, drawing on K Rigby.

²³⁴ Federal Department of Education, ‘Bullying: Information for Parents’, drawing on K Rigby.

²³⁵ Federal Department of Education, ‘Bullying: Information for Parents’, drawing on K Rigby.

²³⁶ M Lemonick, p 49, referring to work by S Limber, Clemson University.

difference between ‘dobbing’ and reporting something which is serious – i.e. bullying. If the bullying occurs while going to and from school, a different route could be found while the matter is being investigated by the school. The child should be encouraged to make a special effort to find a friend either inside or outside of school as one good friend can make a difference to how a child feels.²³⁷

Other tactics suggested to parents for helping their child cope include telling the child to pretend not to hear the taunts; to use a silent ‘self talk’ such as ‘that is their problem, not my problem’; or developing more assertiveness in the child so he or she can face the bully without becoming too scared.²³⁸

The Parenting and Family Support Centre at the University of Queensland has developed the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program which is a multi-level family intervention program that seeks to prevent and treat behavioural and emotional problems in pre-adolescents. It is run by trained practitioners, usually through Queensland Health or Education Queensland. It has become recognised throughout Australia for its effectiveness.²³⁹

Further online help for children who have been bullied, their parents and others can be found at the following websites –

- [Kids Help Line](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au) (ph 1800 55 1800 – a national, free, 24 hour confidential counselling service), www.kidshelpline.com.au;
- www.bullyingnoway.com.au (anti-bullying site established by the federal Government to provide information for schools and families);
- The [Coalition Against Bullying](http://www.ncab.org.au/ncab.html) (aiming to support schools through providing expert advice, through its members, to those developing and implementing school, work and community based programs), <http://www.ncab.org.au/ncab.html>.

²³⁷ Federal Department of Education, ‘Bullying: Information for Parents’, drawing on K Rigby.

²³⁸ Federal Department of Education, ‘Bullying: Information for Parents’, drawing on K Rigby.

²³⁹ Education Queensland, ‘Behaviour Management’, <http://www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/about/behaviour.html>.

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