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MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING
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MEMBER FOR MOLONGLO

Ms Mary Porter AM MLA
Chairperson
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People
ACT Legislative Assembly
London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ms Porter *Mary*

I am pleased to provide the committee with the Government's submission to the Inquiry into restorative justice principles in youth settings – extended terms of reference.

If you wish to explore any of the issues in more detail, the Departmental contact officer for this submission is Ms Kathy Melsom, who can be reached on telephone number 6205 7029.

I trust that the Standing Committee will find the submission a useful contribution to its deliberations.

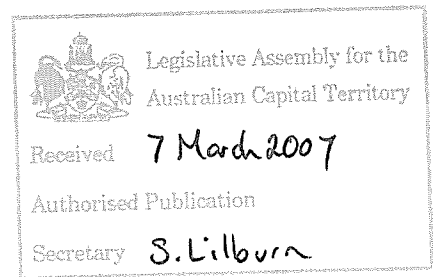
Yours sincerely

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Inquiry into Restorative Justice

Supplementary Submission Extended Terms of Reference

Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People

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INQUIRY INTO RESTORATIVE JUSTICE
Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People

Supplementary Submission
Extended Terms of Reference

**The Management of Bullying, Harassment and Violence in ACT
Government Schools**

Introduction

The Government welcomes the opportunity to provide information to the Standing Committee in response to the extended terms of reference for its Inquiry.

The Government has taken the opportunity to provide further information around the different approaches that schools take towards minimising the effects of bullying, harassment and violence in ACT government schools.

Defining bullying, harassment, conflict and violence

It is important to differentiate between the behaviours of bullying, harassment, conflict and violence, as these behaviours require different types of responses. Schools need to know how to identify these behaviours and respond effectively when they occur. It is the Department's position that:

- bullying and harassment require non-punitive/restorative approaches
- conflict requires mediation
- violence requires consequences as set out in each school's student management and welfare plan.

Definitions used in the Department's Countering Bullying and Harassment policy are:

Bullying and harassment are products of social dynamics and can be defined as the repeated negative actions by individuals or groups against a target individual or group, which involves an imbalance of power. These forms of abuse can take different forms – verbal, physical, social or psychological. Actions can be observable and hidden. Bullying and harassment exist in the wider community across all ages

and environments, for example the workplace and the sporting field, and naturally translate into schools. The important issue is how schools effectively deal with bullying and harassment when it occurs and how schools foster school cultures that minimise its occurrence.

Violence involves incidents where a person is intimidated, abused, threatened, physically assaulted or where property is deliberately damaged by another person. It is an extreme use of force often resulting in injury or destruction. Violence does not necessarily involve an imbalance of power.

Conflict involves a disagreement where one or both party's needs are not being met. It does not necessarily involve an abuse of power, even if parties do not have perceived equal power.

National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF)

"Schools are among the safest places in the community for children and young people. Much good work has already been undertaken and continues to be undertaken by all school jurisdictions to provide a safe and supportive environment. The National Framework identifies strategies that can inform practice which enhances school safety and students' physical, social and emotional wellbeing."
(NSSF p.4)

The NSSF is designed to assist schools to identify and address issues of bullying, harassment, violence and child protection. Schools are required under the framework to engage parents, teachers, students and the wider school community in a review of current safe school practices and to take appropriate action as required.

The Department of Education and Training has reviewed its Safe Schools Policy to reflect the requirements of the NSSF. The ACT Safe Schools Policy emphasises positive student management and approaches to minimise bullying, harassment and violence. This policy, along with a number of other policies and procedures related to student welfare, is currently being updated to ensure compatibility with the ACT *Human Rights Act (2004)*. Schools use Department policies to assist them in the review and refinement of their own school processes and guidelines.

Countering bullying, violence and harassment in ACT government schools

ACT government schools adopt a range of approaches to counter bullying, violence and harassment.

Research evidence suggests that the best approach for countering bullying, harassment and violence is a whole school approach that addresses whole school cultural change. Punitive approaches have proven to be ineffective. Rather than using a punitive approach, it is necessary to provide children and young people with explicit scaffolding and teaching in order for them to understand the impact of their actions. Schools require guidelines and procedures that deal with the issues in a more positive and proactive manner.

Restorative Practices is only one way of dealing with bullying, harassment and violence in educational settings. It is recommended in the NSSF (page 10), as an example of a way to provide support to students by maintaining their ‘connectedness to schooling including facilitating reintegration into the school of those involved in harmful behaviour’.

However, work had begun on the introduction of restorative practices in ACT schools before the NSSF was released in 2004. It began in one or two schools and has now become more widely used across at least 27 schools and is used more as a preventative approach rather than being confined to facilitating conferences on reintegration to school after a suspension.

Other approaches used by schools when bullying or harassment occurs or as preventative strategies include: peer mediation, pro-social skills programs to address respectful relationships and appropriate behaviour and anti-bullying programs to address the issue of bystander behaviour and the development of resilience.

ACT schools are well placed to deal with behavioural issues and use a range of social skills programs that aim to improve student behaviour and learning. Attachment A outlines the range of programs used in schools in the ACT. Schools generally adopt or tailor existing programs to ensure they are relevant and appropriate to their

students. Established programs such as: *Bounce Back, You Can Do It*, and *M and M Pathways* are examples of sound programs commonly in place in ACT schools. Schools also access the *Bullying: No Way* website for ideas and strategies.

Currently, the Department is trialling two new social skills programs, namely *PATHS* (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) and *Second Step*, which are both evidence-based programs. *PATHS* and *Second Step* are whole school programs that have been extensively evaluated in the United States and have been proven to reduce aggression and increase social competency in students. The trials were not undertaken to address gaps in approaches that schools are using. They support the ongoing exploration of evidence-based programs, to enhance what is currently being done. It is expected that these programs are embedded in curriculum and are not add-on programs. The *PATHS* program in particular has a focus on prevention and early intervention. If the evaluation of these programs indicates success in addressing the issues of bullying, harassment and violence, professional learning and advice will be provided to schools to further advance the Department's work in this area.

The Department provides many professional learning opportunities for staff in schools to inform them and enhance their skills about strategies to use when dealing with bullying, harassment and violence. These opportunities have included a mini-conference where specific issues such as the role of the bystander in countering bullying were presented. Erin Erceg, Director of the Friendly Schools and Families Project in Western Australia, was a keynote speaker and presenter. Ms Erceg has been involved in the trial of Friendly Schools and Families, which is a project that has achieved positive results in addressing bullying in Western Australia. Workshops were presented for teachers and people from community agencies.

As a result, several schools have become interested in using the resource in 2007 and awareness has been raised in the wider community. Research has shown that the actions of bystanders play a significant part in the reduction in incidences of bullying.

Data collection

The Department collects data on suspensions of students and injuries to students. This data may include incidents where bullying, violence and harassment have

occurred. The clearer definition of what constitutes bullying, harassment and violence contained in the Department's Countering Bullying and Harassment Policy will assist in gaining a consistent understanding of these issues in schools. This may assist in the collection of valid data.

In 2007 it is intended to conduct a small study of some key schools using restorative practices, which should provide a measure of its impact on student behaviour.

Additional relevant information

Student Management Protocols have been developed by the Department to assist schools in dealing with students who are presenting with behavioural difficulties. These protocols were reviewed in 2006 and will be reissued to schools in 2007 with a greater emphasis on early intervention practices and programs for students with behavioural problems.

A Complex Needs Team has been created to respond to critical incidences in schools and to enhance the potential for teachers and schools to support all students with challenging behaviours.

A Departmental working party is currently looking at policies and procedures around the transfer of student information, including data on incidents of bullying and harassment, between schools and between states. This will facilitate the transfer of critical information between schools, while respecting and preserving student privacy.

In 2006 the Department conducted a research report into the importance of school/community connectedness, "*Engaging families and building home-school connectedness*". This is a high quality report that provided research about how connectedness reduces alienation and conflict and supports the improvement of education outcomes for students. This report will be used to guide and support school principals, especially those serving the most disadvantaged communities, to build capacities in schools and amongst teachers to optimise learning outcomes for students, enhance communication with parents and to work collaboratively with community agencies and key individuals.

ACT government schools have reported on their implementation of the NSSF since 2004 and these reports include the range of approaches, policies and programs that are consistently employed to create safe learning environments for school communities.

While the NSSF is a useful document, it alone is not going to solve issues of bullying, harassment and violence in schools. It is up to jurisdictions and individual schools to determine the programs and policies implemented in each setting. The NSSF is a relatively recent program and as yet there is not sufficient evidence to indicate its effectiveness in reducing the targeted behaviours. The Department will continue to gather the data and will use the information to provide professional development to schools and support staff to more effectively manage and prevent bullying, harassment and violence.

Conclusion

ACT government schools operate within a school-based management and decision-making model. Schools have a level of autonomy that enables them to determine, in consultation with their community, programs that best suit the individual school dynamics and environment. Educational research has provided no evidence to suggest that any one particular program can be applied successfully across all schools to effectively manage and prevent bullying, harassment and violence.

SOCIAL SKILLS PROGRAMS USED IN ACT GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN 2006

Note: This table is not intended to be a comprehensive list but rather examples of schools and the programs they offer. The Department continues to explore evidence-based programs to enable schools to address issues of bullying, harassment and violence.

Programme	Description	Assessment of Outcomes
PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) Pilot Project schools: <i>Primary:</i> Charnwood, Taylor, Charles Conder, Torrens	The Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) curriculum is a comprehensive whole school program that promotes emotional and social competencies and reduces aggression and behaviour problems in primary school-aged children, while simultaneously enhancing the educational process in the classroom.	The PATHS program has been extensively evaluated in the United States and has been accorded Model Program status by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Blueprints Project for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado (http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/programs/PATHS.html). Select Program status by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), Best Practices Program status by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Promising Program status by the US Dept of Education (Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program). It has been evaluated in Perth with similar results to the US.
Second Step Pilot schools: Gold Creek School and Palmerston Primary	Second Step is comprehensive whole school program (K - 10) that is designed to reduce impulsive and aggressive behaviour in children by increasing their social competency skills.	Numerous studies in the US and Europe have found that Second Steps reduces aggressive and anti-social behaviours along with reductions in depression and anxiety in students and improvements in learning. It is rated highly by numerous US government agencies.
You Can Do It: Schools: <i>Primary:</i> Aranda, Arawang, Bonython, Fadden, Florey, Gilmore, Kaleen, Southern Cross, Theodore, Turner, Urambi, Village Creek, Weetangera, Weston Creek, Yarralumla	This program provides an insight into under-achievement and offers ways of addressing and breaking down the barriers that are the underlying causes of underachievement. You Can Do It! Education Mentoring Program aims to provide structure and tools for teaching students how to be the success they can be.	The background conceptual framework of YCDI seems to be fairly solid. What is interesting is that the model targets academic achievement only and the unpublished masters research and case studies show an improvement in academic outcomes. However, only one study looked at a Social Emotional Learning dimension (self esteem) and this showed no difference between treatment and control.

Programme	Description	Assessment of Outcomes
M and M Pathways Pathways to Positive Peer Relations. <i>Primary:</i> Gowrie, Narrabundah, Isabella Plains, Lyons, Richardson and The Woden School	A social skills programme to assist with social skills teaching. Aims to develop students' confidence to make choices and the awareness to recognise the consequences of those choices.	No formal evaluation has been completed (according to the developers)
Friendly Schools Friendly Classrooms + Friendly Schools and Families	An Australian whole school approach to bullying.	Extensive evaluation (using control groups) indicated that when the program is implemented with the whole school approach there is a reduction in the amount of bullying being experienced.
Why Try <i>High Schools</i> Stromlo High, Kaleen High	The WhyTry Program helps youth (Y 7-10) answer the question "WhyTry?" when they are frustrated, confused or angry with life's pressures and challenges. Youth learn not to give up easily and to be resilient to everyday pressures. The WhyTry Program encourages youth not to lash out at society or to act out their anger and blame others for adverse life circumstances. They learn instead to channel their energy into constructive behavior and options which will lead to more self-respect, more opportunity in life and more personal freedom of choice.	A relatively new program that has one outcome study, which found that students who participated in a program called WhyTry were more likely to have less attendance problems, a lower negative attitude toward teachers and school, and a higher locus of control. They indicated that they were more personally responsible for their behaviour. The students also had higher grades than the control group. Teachers rated a significant improvement in motivational attributes.

Programme	Description	Assessment of Outcomes
Bully Busters: Amelia Suckling and Carla Temple References: Bullying – A Whole School Approach (ACER) Schools: Gowrie Primary	<i>Bullying: A Whole-School Approach</i> <i>or Bully Busters</i> suggests that bullying should be dealt with as a 'whole school' issue. Bully-Busters is a three-pronged program to deal with bullying quickly, effectively and set long term bully management strategies for teachers, parents and children.	MindMatters Plus: No formal evaluation is available. One U.S. study was found that indicated a reduction in bullying behaviour.
Restorative Practices <i>Primary:</i> Charnwood, Southern Cross, North Ainslie, Forrest, Girralang, Lyons, Mt Neighbour, Tharwa, Urambi, Village Creek, Bonython, Calwell, Chisholm, Gilmore, Gordon, Isabella, Richardson, Theodore, <i>High:</i> Calwell, Caroline Chisholm, Lanyon, Gold Creek, Telopea Park, Alfred Deakin, Belconnen Woden School and Wanniasa School	Restorative Practices is defined as restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision-making. Popular processes are: restorative conferencing, mediation, corridor conferencing, problem solving circles. These can be supplemented by: using circle time teaching learning framework and adopting a strong focus on Social Emotional Learning. Restorative Approach is based on a set of principles relating to the repair of harm at a relational level. Restorative Practices is essentially about relationships and interactions, aimed at promoting a sense of connectedness within schools and their communities this means there is expected to be a great deal of variability in the application of the principles and processes. This makes it difficult to evaluate across settings. However, if implemented correctly, it may... improve the school environment and enhance the learning and development of young people (Youth Justice Board for England & Wales, 2004, p 65). There is Australian data that indicates there is a decrease in suspension rates through the application of restorative conferencing in schools, along with high rates of participant satisfaction (eg person harmed, parents and wrongdoer) and high rates of compliance with agreement (above 90%).	

Programme	Description	Assessment of Outcomes
Aussie Optimism	The Aim of the Aussie Optimism program is to promote optimistic thinking and life skills in young people to assist them in meeting the challenges and stresses of adolescence. It can be used for adolescents making their transition to secondary school or for those attending middle school.	This program has shown effectiveness in reducing depressive symptoms, changing pessimistic attributional style and improving classroom behaviour, compared to control groups up to six months after treatment (Jaycox, Reivich, Gillham, & Seligman, 1994). Follow up studies two years after the completion of the program have found that the effects are sustained and depression prevented in children at risk (Gillham, Reivich, Jaycox & Seligman, 1995).
Bounce Back! Resiliency Program: Schools: <i>Primary:</i> Calwell, Chapman, Giralang, Hall, Macquarie, Maribyrnong, Monash, Fraser	This is a classroom resiliency program based on curriculum units on Core Values, The Bright Side, Courage, Emotions, Bullying, Relationships, Humour and Being Successful.	In September 2003 the Bounce Back! Resiliency Program was awarded the Robin Winkler Award for Excellence in Applied Research in Community Psychology by the Australian Psychological Society.
Resourceful Adolescent Program (RAP)	The aim of RAP is to reduce the incidence of depression and associated problems in young people. It is an experiential, resilience-building program that has been designed to promote positive coping abilities and the maintenance of a sense of self in the face of stressful and difficult circumstances. It is a universal program that targets all teenagers in a particular grade.	Efficacy and effectiveness of RAP-A have been supported through several randomised controlled trials. The trials support RAP-A's efficacy in the short and medium term.
Mind Matters Schools: <i>High:</i> Caroline Chisholm, Kaleen, Stromlo,	A whole school program to promote and protect the social and emotional wellbeing of all members of the school community.	Improvements in help seeking behaviours, mental health literacy and empathy have been found. Reductions in bullying, aggressive behaviours and substance abuse are less uniform and may depend on implementation processes within schools.
Stop Think Do Schools - <i>Primary:</i> Amaroo, Chisholm, Gilmore, Higgins, Latham Rivett, Wanniasa Hills	A program designed to help students stop and think about situations before responding in an emotional manner.	No outcomes research has been found.

Programme	Description	Assessment of Outcomes
Heart Masters Schools: <i>Primary:</i> Flynn, Holt	Heart Masters is based on Australian research and can be viewed as more of a resource than a program. It provides schools with a way to build resilience and emotional intelligence in students by utilising a number of activities to engage and instruct students whilst promoting resilience and well-being. It is a flexible resource that can also compliment other interventions.	No outcomes research has been found. The program is based on well-established theories of behavioural change including social learning theory and a cognitive/rational approach.
Habits of the Mind Schools: <i>Primary:</i> Wanniasa Hills <i>High:</i> Alfred Deakin	Habits of the Mind aid students in school and adults in everyday life as they are challenged by problems, dilemmas, paradoxes, and enigmas for which the solutions are not immediately apparent. Drawing on the Habits of Mind means knowing how to behave intelligently when you don't know the answers. It means not only having information, but also knowing how to act on it.	No outcomes research has been found.
Rock and Water Schools: <i>Primary:</i> Turner, Farrer <i>High:</i> Melrose, Melba, Lyneham	The Rock and Water Program aims to apply a physical/social approach to assist boys in their development to adulthood by increasing their self-realisation, self-confidence, self-respect, boundary awareness, self-awareness, and intuition. A specific goal of the course is teaching boys to deal with power, strength and powerlessness.	No outcomes research has been found.
Friendly Kids Friendly Classrooms Schools: Co-op School, <i>Primary:</i> Hawker, Miles Franklin, Tharwa, <i>High:</i> Telopea Park	The four parts to this book offer a complete program of classroom and playground skills that will help children get along with their classmates.	Recommended by the Department of Education Tasmania as a literacy resource and further recommended by the Western Australia Curriculum Board as a resource for developing self-esteem and interpersonal skills. No outcomes research has been found.

PALS (Playing and Learning to Socialise) (Pre-school – Kindergarten)	The Playing and Learning to Socialise (PALS) Program is a preventative program designed to support children in developing the key skills that they need in order to play and socialise with their peers effectively.	Two studies (Australian and UK) indicate that the PALS Program is an effective early intervention tool to reduce problem behaviour in preschool children.
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