



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR
THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Report on the inquiry into
Prevention of Violence in Schools

REPORT NUMBER 2
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

May 1996

RESOLUTION OF APPOINTMENT

The following general purpose standing committees be established to inquire into and report on matters referred to them by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community ...

... a Standing Committee on Social Policy to examine matters related to health, hospitals, nursing homes, welfare, employment, housing, social security, the ageing, people with a disability, the family, Aboriginal people, youth affairs, the status of women, multicultural affairs, industrial relations, occupational health and safety, education, the arts, sport and recreation.

(Minutes of Proceedings, Third Assembly, No. 1, 9 March 1995, p 7)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Standing Committee on Social Policy inquire into and report on the prevention of violence in schools with particular reference to the following -

- (1) the current programs and need for programs for preventing violence, bullying and harassment across the different sectors of schooling;
- (2) training and support for teachers in managing programs;
- (3) resourcing of programs;
- (4) issues relating to case management within schools and the broader community;
- (5) evaluation mechanisms in place; and
- (6) any other related matter.

(Minutes of Proceedings, Standing Committee on Social Policy, 5 June 1995)

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Ms Kerrie Tucker (Chair)

Ms Marion Reilly (Deputy Chair) (*appointed 26 March 1996*)

Mr Harold Hird

Ms Roberta McRae (*discharged 26 March 1996*)

Secretary: Ms Judith Henderson

Illustrations: Year 10 Art Students, Campbell High School.

Richardson Primary School students

PREFACE

The issue of violence in our society is very complex. There does, however, seem to be general agreement that violence is related to a number of factors including early childhood experiences, cultural factors, schooling experiences, influences of the media and films and alcohol and other substance abuse.

During the course of this inquiry it became clear that all these factors are relevant and that violence in schools cannot be separated from the broader issues of violence in our community. It also became clear that while serious violence only affects a small group of students, more subtle forms of violence are widespread. These more subtle forms of violence are not always given the attention they deserve. They include verbal and emotional violence, sexual harassment, homophobia and racism.

This Report considers in detail how schools and the community can be better supported in developing a non-violent culture. I sincerely hope immediate and serious attention is given to the Report. The recommendations address a number of the issues that were identified as contributing factors to violence in our schools - these include socio-economic status, self-esteem, peer group pressure, school policies and practices, learning difficulties, the level of teacher training support, gender issues and the home environment.

The Committee received many submissions and held a number of public hearings with organisations and individuals. A strong thread through all the submissions was that we need to move away from the blaming and punitive approach to an understanding and supportive approach.

This was well expressed by a mother in the South Australian PEACE Pack:

“My daughter has been bullied, and became a bully in her early years of primary school. Bullies are not happy people.”

If the cycle of violence is to be broken, it is essential that we not only look at school practices, but also that we continue to address violence in the home and in our society. A key recommendation is more family support services such as parent education and early intervention for families at risk. The Committee also recommended increasing the funding for family counselling services in schools.

Solutions to the issues of violence in our community require long term planning and political will, as well as greater provision of resources directed towards prevention and early intervention.

We have an unacceptably high level of violence in our society and we need to act now. I hope this report forms a basis for moving some of the very important issues forward. The recommendations of this report must be taken seriously. Economic arguments are often short-sighted and short term - the effects of violence on the wellbeing of our community are longer term. As the National Committee on Violence noted in its Report - we have a choice - we can pay now and implement programs to reduce violence or we pay later. It costs a great deal more in the long run both financially and socially to deal with the results of not taking action.

In conclusion, I thank the committee secretary for her tireless efforts in preparing this report, and the other members of the committee, including former member Ms McRae for their support and work. I'd also like to thank all those people who contributed to the Committee's Inquiry. In particular, I would like to thank the Woden Youth Centre for organising a forum at their Centre where the Committee listened to the views of young people and the students and teachers of Campbell High School and Richardson Primary School for their creative art works.

Kerrie Tucker MLA
Chair
May 1996

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In April 1995 the Committee held a series of briefing meetings with government and community organisations to determine their views on the major social policy issues facing the ACT community.

Violence in the community was one of the issues of concern to the community at that time and as a first step at addressing the issue the Committee decided to conduct an inquiry into the Prevention of Violence in Schools.

Conduct of the inquiry

The inquiry was advertised in local newspapers in the first week of July 1995. In addition letters, inviting submissions, were sent to all school boards and Parent and Citizen Associations of ACT government schools, all ACT private schools, unions, and relevant community organisations.

In response 37 submissions were received and the Committee held six public hearings.

The Committee visited the Department of Education and Training's student support units which are withdrawal programs providing intervention programs for students with serious behavioural problems, the Adolescent Day Unit and several ACT government schools. It also attended a forum of young people facilitated by the Woden Youth Centre.

In order to gain a wider perspective on issues related to violence in schools the Committee travelled to South Australia where it participated in a forum hosted by Flinders University, held informal discussions with a number of officials from the Department for Education and Children's Services and visited several programs.

Context of the inquiry

Soon after the Committee embarked on this inquiry it became aware of a number of reviews already undertaken in relation to the subject of violence and violence in schools. In 1990 the National Committee on Violence released its report *Violence: Directions for Australia*. In 1994 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training

released *'Sticks and Stones'* the report of its inquiry into violence in Australian schools.

At the local level, in 1991 the then Standing Committee on Social Policy conducted an inquiry into *'Behavioural Disturbance among Young People'*. That inquiry examined many of the issues covered by the terms of reference of the current inquiry.

In 1993 the ACT Department of Education and Training conducted its own review of behaviour management support services, the outcome of which is reported in *'Catch them Doing Something Good - A Review of Behaviour Management Support Services in the ACT'*. This was an extensive review involving wide ranging input including over 100 individuals and 29 schools as well as visits to 29 programs, including some in New South Wales.

These two ACT reviews identified and made recommendations about several issues also covered in this report. Unfortunately over the years little progress has been made towards implementing their recommendations. Specifically, little action has been taken on recommendations concerning:

- early intervention for students with behavioural problems;
- the provision of family support programs;
- aspects of the withdrawal unit for primary students with behavioural problems;
- alternative educational programs for young people who have not completed or are at risk of not completing high school;
- the establishment of a child development unit; and
- training and support for teachers.

Some action has been taken on the establishment of an interagency referral process - a matter which the Committee considers to be long overdue. An interagency referral process called *'Youth Connection: Student/Youth Coordinating Service (District)* is getting underway as this report goes to print.

The Committee's terms of reference included an examination of violence in schools in relation to broader community issues. As the inquiry progressed it became very clear to the Committee that schools cannot be expected to solve the problem of violence on their own. The Committee believes that schools are working hard to develop safe and violence free environments, but that much more needs to be done to ensure they receive adequate support. The Committee recognises that violence is a wider community problem and its prevention and management in schools needs to be considered in a wider context.

The Committee's recommendations go beyond addressing the issues of violence at the school level and consider the issues in the broader context including the role of the family, socio-economic factors, issues of gender and community attitudes and values.

Recommendations

The Committee has made the following recommendations, which are grouped around common issues and areas of responsibility.

A Responsibilities of the Act Department of Education and Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau

Programs for the prevention and management of violence in ACT government schools

The Committee recommends that:

- the Department of Education and Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau examine ways to further resource 'off-line' programs or similar flexible approaches for students not coping in the mainstream. This further resourcing must not be at the expense of existing effective programs; (Paragraph 3.62)
- as a matter of urgency the Department of Education and Training and Children's Youth and Family Services Bureau develop intervention programs for students on suspension from government schools; (Paragraph 3.80)
- the Department of Education and Training and Children's Youth and Family Services Bureau examine more flexible and localised models of delivery of behaviour management support and withdrawal programs for primary school students; (Paragraph 3.118)
- the Department of Education and Training and Children's Youth and Family Services Bureau arrange for the participation in appropriate alternative educational and life skills programs for students unable to reintegrate into mainstream schools, especially students under 15 years of age; (Paragraph 3.125)

Training

- the Department of Education and Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau ensure that:
 - * all its teachers participate in courses relating to behaviour management and that necessary refresher training is provided;
 - * all contact staff in special settings have the opportunity to participate in Professional Assault Response Training or other similar programs. (Paragraph 5.20)

Evaluation

- Youth Connection: Student/Youth Coordinating Service (District) be evaluated after one year of operation and the report be provided to the Assembly. (Paragraph 4.48)

Resourcing issues

The Committee recommends that:

- the Government conduct a research study to identify needs of disadvantaged school communities and investigate more effective use of current resources to meet those needs; (Paragraph 5.49)
- the Government establish a fund to assist students whose parents do not have the capacity to meet the costs of their children's participation in defined excursions, extra curricular activities or specific subjects; (Paragraph 5.49)
- as a matter of urgency, the Government provide the Social Policy Committee with a thorough assessment of the equity implications of school based management including the ability of all schools to provide high standard support to students at risk; (Paragraph 5.49)

B Wider Government responsibilities

Legislation

The Committee recommends that:

- the Government explore the need for non government schools in the ACT to be obliged to have official school policies relating to student discipline that do not permit corporal punishment; (Paragraph 3.19)

Police involvement in schools

The Committee recommends that:

- the Department of Education and Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau and the Australian Federal Police work together to develop guidelines for the reporting of incidents to the police; (Paragraph 3.71)

Support to families

The Committee recommends that:

- the Government give priority to the maintenance of existing early intervention programs and the establishment of further programs to deal with students at risk including a therapeutic program to meet the needs of children with severe disruptive behaviour or emotional disturbance. Such programs should offer opportunities for parental involvement. They should not be to the detriment of programs for older students; (Paragraph 4.10)
- the Government develop a strategy for the provision of family support services, such as parental training and education programs and intervention programs for families at risk; (Paragraph 4.17)
- the Government develop a publicity campaign which will encourage families to seek assistance as soon as difficulties are encountered. (Paragraph 4.17)

Resourcing issues

The Committee recommends that:

- the Government, as a matter of urgency, examine ways of increasing funding for counselling services to schools to provide greater access to family counselling services; (Paragraph 5.41)
- the Government give an assurance that the proposed untying of Commonwealth grants will not lead to a decrease in real terms in funds for programs which support equity across the whole school system. (Paragraph 5.49)

C General Issues

Sport and recreational activities in schools

The Committee recommends that:

- schools place greater emphasis and value on non competitive recreational and sporting activities and provide a better balance between competitive and non competitive activities. (Paragraph 3.96)

Implementation of recommendations

The Committee is keen to ensure that the findings of this inquiry are acted upon quickly. Therefore, the Committee will continue to monitor developments in relation to the implementation of this report's recommendations and will request a further update on progress with their implementation in May 1997. The Committee, may present a further report to the Assembly on the issues under consideration.

1. THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

What is school violence?

1.1. In examining this question the Committee wishes to make it clear that it does not believe that in general, violence in schools is out of control and that schools are not coping. For some students school is indeed safer than home. The Committee recognises that violence is a community problem and that schools alone cannot be expected to solve this problem.

1.2. The evidence received by the Committee, however, indicates that violence in schools is an issue of growing concern to students, teachers and parents and one which must be taken seriously and addressed.

1.3. The Committee was disturbed to hear that some schools did not wish to participate in the inquiry because they feared being labelled as a school with a violence problem.

1.4. In addressing the terms of reference of the inquiry the ACT Department of Education and Training used the following definitions of violence in its submission.

***Physical violence** involves the unjust or unwarranted exertion of force. This includes physical abuse by assault, fighting, bullying or any deliberate act which is intended to cause harm to others.*

***Verbal violence** is the use of language to threaten or inflict unjust or unwarranted intimidation. This includes the threat of physical force, and psychological and emotional abuse by means of foul language, threats and other forms of verbal intimidation.*

***Harassment** refers to behaviour intended to intimidate or threaten the victim. This can include physical and verbal violence, as well as damage to personal property, vandalism, sexual harassment and theft.¹*

¹ Department of Education and Training, *Submission*.

1.5. A common form of violence occurring in schools is bullying. Rigby² defines bullying as

repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons.

1.6. The Committee accepts this definition of bullying and would include bullying in a definition of verbal violence.

1.7. As the Conflict Resolution Service noted violence is not a homogeneous concept nor is it synonymous with conflict nor always associated with disputes. Some violence such as bullying is more about the denial of conflict by denying the other person's right to be different. Some violence may be the end result of disputing behaviour, while acts of violence may sometimes lead to disputes.³

1.8. In this report violence is defined as:

any behaviour which results in physical or psychological damage to another person or causes fear.

Forms of violence

1.9. Violence in schools takes many forms. It can be

- physical violence or assault which is evidenced by bruising and cuts and extends to fights either at school or more frequently off the school grounds;
- verbal abuse such as teasing, 'put-downs' and making verbal threats;
- harassment both verbal, physical and sexual;
- bullying which involves unequal power relationships and can take the form of physical and verbal abuse and harassment as well as such unacceptable behaviours as malicious exclusion, invasion of personal space, rumour spreading and staring with malicious intent; and
- system violence where punitive and authoritarian language and practices dominate the school culture.

1.10. Differences in the type of violence between males and females was reported by school boards, educators and high school students. Generally violence is more likely to be of the physical kind among boys and verbal

² Rigby, Ken, *An Evaluation of Strategies and Methods for Addressing Problems of Peer Abuse in Schools*, Paper presented at the 1994 National Conference on Behaviour Management and Behaviour Change of Children and Youth with Emotional and/or Behaviour Problems.

³ Conflict Resolution Service, *Submission*.

among girls. Although it was mentioned that physical violence is evident among girls in some schools.

Fights

1.11. Fights seemed to be an accepted part of growing up particularly among boys. The Committee was told that fights are focussed around groups rather than individuals, are often racially and ethnically based and can be started by rumours or bullying. Fights can occur within the peer group but boys more often fight with those outside the group. Once a situation escalates to a threat to fight there is huge pressure on the participants to ensure that the fight takes place. The actual fight is more likely to occur outside the school grounds, for example at a shopping centre. The threat of further fights carries over to the classroom resulting in students being too frightened to come to school. Fights between girls are becoming more frequent.⁴ One high school principal suggested that girls are being influenced by a 'gladiator mentality' which is promoted by television.

1.12. Boys who show themselves to be a fighter are often picked on by others who want to prove themselves. Young people reported that teachers will focus on a student's reputation as a fighter and continually harass the individual student rather than dealing with the issue with the group concerned.

Put-downs

1.13. Put-downs are a common form of verbal abuse, which sadly are part of the Australian culture. It was reported by students that put-downs occurring within the group are seen as normal interaction and not offensive or provocative. Put-downs by persons outside the group were however reported as very provocative and as occurring between students and teachers and among students. Teachers were seen to use severe put-downs to intimidate students and students see this as a serious form of bullying by teachers.⁵ Some students felt that put-downs exist in the structure of some school routines for example where girls participating in sporting and fitness activities are expected to weigh themselves publicly.

1.14. Students use such forms of verbal abuse as an alternative to physical abuse and a way of exerting power without the threat of suspension from school. Put-downs can escalate into later violence.

1.15. Some young people felt that put-downs can result in poor concentration and school refusal.

⁴ Discussions at Woden Youth Centre.

⁵ *ibid.*

Sexual harassment

1.16. Sexual harassment of girls by boys was reported as a problem in high schools. Sexual harassment is defined as

*unwanted, unsolicited and unreciprocated conduct of a sexual nature.*⁶

Sexual harassment is closely related to bullying, racism, sexism and homophobia and is usually directed at an individual or a group by another individual or group. It includes the following behaviours:

- sexually oriented kidding or joking;
- demeaning comments with a sexual basis;
- displays of sexually graphic material;
- physical intimidation such as ogling, leering or blocking access to or exit from an area;
- offensive hand or body gestures;
- physical contact such as deliberately brushing against another person; and
- deliberate unwelcome physical contact such as patting, pinching, fondling, touching or putting an arm around another person.

Bullying

1.17. Bullying was identified as an issue of concern to most of the schools submitting to the inquiry. As mentioned above bullying includes a wide range of unacceptable behaviours and always involves an unequal power relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Commonly reported forms of bullying include demanding money, making racist comments, homophobic taunts, teasing and interfering in games.

1.18. Research conducted nationally involving over 40 schools and 15,000 students shows that bullying is widespread in Australian schools. Research by Rigby and Slee indicated that one child in seven reported being bullied at least once a week by others at school. The incidence varies from school to school and in some cases was found to be as high as one in four.⁷

1.19. In a survey conducted by one high school in 1994, 65 per cent of students claimed they had been victims of bullying behaviour at some stage.⁸

⁶ *Policies and Guidelines for Dealing with Sexual Harassment*, ACT Department of Education and Training, June 1992.

⁷ Rigby, K and Slee P T, *Statement for the House of Representatives Committee on Violence in Schools*.

⁸ Melrose High School, *Submission*.

Violence on the sports field

1.20. Violence is evident in sporting activities yet is largely unchallenged as it is part of the wider culture of violence. Only two submissions referred to violence in sport.

Violence based on homophobia

1.21. The Committee was told that there is increasing evidence of links between violence in schools and homophobia, such as bullying and harassment.⁹

The extent of violence in ACT Schools

1.22. It is difficult to accurately determine the extent of violence in schools because of definitional problems. What may be described as violence by one person may be seen as 'having a bit of a scrum' by another. Similarly, forms of system violence such as sarcastic or belittling verbal comments may be perceived as legitimate disciplinary measures.

1.23. Anecdotal evidence from schools suggests that the safety of schools is being jeopardised by the violent and intimidating behaviour of a small number of students.¹⁰

1.24. Majura Primary School stated that while violence is a reality at all schools it is confined to only about five per cent of students with only one per cent of the school population displaying severe violent behaviour at times.¹¹

1.25. A group of high school students also confirmed that serious violence is generally confined to small groups of students in a school and is not evident throughout the school.¹²

1.26. Since 1993 the ACT Department of Education and Training has conducted a survey of violent incidents towards staff. During the month of May each year staff are asked to report all incidents of violence. The onus is on each individual teacher to send in a response. Results from the survey over the last three years indicate a small reduction in the level of reported violence. In 1993, 437 incidents were reported, with 430 in 1994 and 403 in 1995. These results must be treated cautiously as not all schools responded to the surveys. In each year verbal violence was the most significant form of violence reported, followed by physical violence, and harassment. The survey results indicate

⁹ AIDS Action Council, *Submission*.

¹⁰ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, *Submission*.

¹¹ Majura Primary School, *Submission*.

¹² Discussions at Woden Youth Centre.

that reported violence in pre schools and colleges is extremely low, however it is increasing in special schools, due to the changing student group.¹³

1.27. More detailed data is available on the extent of bullying and sexual harassment. As already mentioned research on a national basis indicates that one in seven students claim to be bullied at least once a week. An ACT study on sexual harassment concluded that at the time the data was collected sexual harassment was prevalent in government high schools.¹⁴ Anecdotal evidence suggests that sexual harassment is still widespread in high schools.¹⁵

1.28. An analysis of suspension data from ACT government schools shows a slight increase in the percentage of students suspended between 1990, 1991¹⁶ and first semester 1995¹⁷ from 0.9 per cent in 1990, 1.1 per cent in 1991 to 1.2 per cent in first semester 1995. In this semester 74.8 per cent of suspensions were for acts of violence compared with 60 per cent in 1990 and 1991. This data suggests there has been an increase in the incidence of serious violence in ACT government schools over the last few years. It however, supports the view of schools that severe violent behaviour is confined to a small proportion of students.

1.29. Research, statistical and anecdotal evidence identified violence being more prevalent among boys. Schools reported that more often boys were the aggressors as well as complaining of being the victims of violence. Boys comprised 82 per cent of total suspensions in first semester 1995.

1.30. Current research suggests violence is also a significant problem for girls albeit in a different form.¹⁸

1.31. Schools also reported an increase in violent behaviour among very young children.¹⁹ The Committee finds this most disturbing.

The effects on students of violence

1.32. Any form of violence in schools has some effect on students and teachers. Violent behaviour can lead to poor educational outcomes for not only

¹³ Department of Education and Training, correspondence dated 29 April 1996.

¹⁴ Hinson S, *What We Do Will Make a Difference - Teacher perceptions of sexual harassment in ACT high schools*, Canberra, April 1994.

¹⁵ Discussions at Woden Youth Centre.

¹⁶ Omaji P, 'Violence in Schools and Preventive Responses', *House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 'Violence in Australian Schools' 1993-94 Submissions to the Inquiry*, p 82.

¹⁷ ACT Department of Education and Training, *Submission*.

¹⁸ Owens Laurence D and MacMullin Colin E, 'Gender Differences in Aggression in Children and Adolescents in South Australian Schools', *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, Vol 6, 1995, pp 21-35.

¹⁹ For example *Submissions 7, 10; Transcript*, p 63, p 90.

the student exhibiting the violent behaviour but for other students in the class. It can also result in low teacher morale and poor performance which lessens the possibility of solutions being found and which in turn can lead to a poor image for a school or education system. As school based management is introduced and the market model of education develops issues affecting a school's reputation will become even more important.

1.33. Violent behaviour can also result in costs to the community in terms of physical damage such as vandalism, as well as the costs associated with lost educational opportunities for children.

1.34. The effects on individual students vary depending on the type and level of violence. For example, a student demonstrating a high level of physical violence in a classroom has an immediate and obvious effect on the other students in the class. They are distracted from their task, probably frightened and concerned about their safety.

1.35. On the other hand more subtle forms of violence such as some forms of bullying and harassment have less easily observable effects.

1.36. Slee²⁰ cited a number of studies reporting deleterious psychological side effects of bullying. Research with primary and secondary school students clearly indicates that victims of bullying suffer lower self esteem, and are less happy at school. Consequently there can be effects in adult life.

1.37. In another study with secondary students, Slee²¹ demonstrated that bullying is associated with poorer health status among victims of bullying and poorer health in girls who showed a tendency to bully.

²⁰ Slee, P T, 'Bullying at School', *Children Australia*, Vol 18, No 4, 1993.

²¹ Slee, P T, 'Bullying: Health Concerns of Australian Secondary School Students', *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, Vol 5, 1995.

2. INFLUENCES ON BEHAVIOUR

2.1. In its 1990 report *Violence: Directions for Australia*,²² the National Committee on Violence pointed out that the risk of violence depends on the interaction of a number of factors including in descending order of importance: child development and the influence of the family; cultural factors; personality factors; substance abuse; biological factors; mental illness; media influences and peers and schooling.

2.2. Violence is a community problem not a problem confined to schools. As the ACT Branch of the Australian Education Union noted in its submission, schools inevitably reflect the society of which they are a part and as such will reflect changes in attitudes, values or behaviours of that society.²³

2.3. In its submission to the inquiry Lyneham High School contended that since students spend less than 20 per cent of their time at school, influences outside the school environment will play a greater role in the social development of young people.²⁴ The Committee's attention was drawn to a number of these influences.

2.4. Schools and young people saw domestic violence as a major issue. Young people²⁵ related experiences with violence at home and in the wider community, with violence at school. Some of the home experiences described included witnessing verbal and physical violence between parents, such as abusive language, drunkenness and beating. They also talked about taking out at school the anger resulting from violence at home. The young people reported that boys tend to do this by acting out, while the girls stated that they were more likely to talk about these issues with their friends.

2.5. Students are sometimes exposed to opposing disciplinary values and practices between the home and the school. Some parents see corporal punishment as their only effective means of disciplining a child, which is in opposition to the policies of schools which no longer use corporal punishment.

2.6. Child abuse was cited by teachers and counsellors as correlating with violent behaviour by some students.²⁶

²² National Committee on Violence, *Violence: Directions for Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1990.

²³ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, *Submission*.

²⁴ Lyneham High School, *Submission*.

²⁵ Discussions at Woden Youth Centre.

²⁶ Discussions with staff at Student Support Units.

2.7. Family crises are also acknowledged as often having an effect on student behaviour. The effects vary from withdrawal and low self esteem to violent behaviour in a very small number of cases.

2.8. Family functioning has been reported as a factor which influences behaviour. Rigby²⁷ demonstrated that families in which there is little positive support for children and inadequate communication are more likely to have children who bully others. Edgar and Ochiltree²⁸ in a study of children in their first year of school, which examined the effects of child care experience, reported that the major influences on social-emotional outcomes such as aggressive and less compliant behaviour are family background, resources and the characteristics of the mother and the child.

2.9. Prescott²⁹ reports a growing body of research which links children's low levels of social competence/social deficits with subsequent long term academic, social and psychological functioning. At school socially inept students often misbehave because they feel poorly accepted by their peers and do not use appropriate social skills to try to form positive relationships with other students and their teachers. The Committee was told that 10 per cent of school students do not have any friends and are therefore missing out on significant opportunities to develop fundamental social skills.³⁰

2.10. School boards and education officials linked the influence of television to the development of violent behaviour among students and to an increasing acceptance of violence by children. As one school observed in its newsletter:

*There is definitely an increasing acceptance of violence by children. Too often kids will describe with abundant enthusiasm the violence of the TV show of the night before...as though the violence was just an accepted part of life.*³¹

2.11. Another message children are reported to be receiving about violence is that of self defence. Some children are encouraged by their families to hit back as an act of self defence. It is questionable whether primary aged children have the maturity and experience to understand the concept of the right to self defence. It is also questionable whether it is useful to encourage the use of violence at all.

²⁷ Rigby, K. 'School children's perceptions of their families and parents as a function of peer-relations', *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, Vol 154, No 4, 1993, pp 501-513.

²⁸ Edgar, D. and Ochiltree, G. *Today's Child Care, Tomorrow's Children*, AIFS Early Childhood Study Paper No 7, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 1995.

²⁹ Prescott Kate, editor, *Teaching Prosocial Behaviour to Adolescents - a directory of processes and programs used in Australian schools*, Australian Guidance and Counselling Association, Adelaide, South Australia, 1995, p 16.

³⁰ Presentation by Dr Colin MacMullin to Forum at Flinders University, February 1996.

³¹ Majura Primary School, *Submission*.

2.12. A number of participants in the inquiry provided evidence which linked problems in coping with the academic demands of school with violent behaviour. Violent behaviour often has its source in frustration and low achievement at school. Low literacy and numeracy levels were reported as almost invariably evident among students referred to the Department of Education and Training's student support units. Large class size and cut backs in resourcing for literacy and numeracy are issues which can impact on the level of violence in schools.

2.13. Violent behaviour is not confined to students having difficulty with the academic program. The Committee was told that some very bright students also exhibit violent behaviour. The relevance of the curriculum was cited as a possible contributing factor.

2.14. School policies and practices also influence behaviour. Schools reported that where the extent of violence is investigated and whole school policies put in place to address the issue, levels of violence are reduced. This is supported by research.³²

2.15. Several submissions discussed the importance of consciously creating a non-violent environment in schools. The view was put that while violence exists in the broader community schools can be non violent environments and provide a role model for resolving differences in a non violent way. It was asserted by one witness that at present schools are creating environments where violence is legitimate. However, this can be changed by establishing an environment where teachers, principals and students do not act in ways which make violence a logical outcome.³³ The Committee's attention was drawn to the profound effect the language teachers use can have on a school culture and the level of violence in a school. Language which reflects and breeds a punitive culture, such as blaming a student behaving badly for interfering with the learning of 'good' students or blaming a student's poor behaviour on his/her chaotic home life, does little to reduce or prevent violence.³⁴

2.16. The Committee visited several schools in both the ACT and South Australia where significant changes in school culture and practices had occurred resulting in a school culture which is typified by non violent resolution of conflict and frustration.

2.17. In discussions with high school principals and staff the demographic composition of a school and the design of school buildings were noted as

³² For example Rigby, K. 'Countering bullying in schools', *CAFHS Forum on Child and Youth Health*, Vol 1 (2) March 1993.

³³ Transcript, p 53.

³⁴ Richmond Christine, *Managing for the reduction of violence in schools: Looking at teacher language*, paper presented to the Australian Education Union Branch Conference, Canberra, 1995.

influences on student behaviour.³⁵ Some schools in newer communities with a high proportion of low income earners have great difficulty in collecting voluntary school contributions and subject levies. One high school reported that it can collect the voluntary parent contribution from only 17 per cent of parents compared to a more established school which collects from 68 per cent of parents. As a result the school is not able to offer the same range of choices for students as schools with greater resources and believes this can influence student behaviour.

2.18. Building design is also seen by some as influencing student behaviour. Factors such as low ceilings, narrow corridors, many corners which reduce the line of vision and the location of toilet blocks were reported as being less conducive to the creation of a non violent environment. The Committee draws attention to the need for new schools to be designed to take into account factors which influence student behaviour.

2.19. The Committee believes that despite the fact that the influences on behaviour are widespread and extend well beyond the school environment, schools must be safe places and must be supported to reach this end.

³⁵ Discussions at Calwell and Stromlo High Schools.

3. STRATEGIES FOR THE MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

3.1. The evidence reported in the previous chapters indicates that violence in schools is an issue which must be addressed if students are to receive the maximum advantage from their education and be well equipped to face adult life.

3.2. The literature reports conflicting views about schools' responsibility for dealing with violence. One view is that violence is a social issue which schools should not be expected to deal with. The other view purports that not only do schools have an obligation to provide a safe, non discriminatory environment where students can learn, they also have a very important role to play in the prevention of violence in schools and the community by providing guidance and role models for students and their families. The latter view is predominant in the ACT.

3.3. Schools alone cannot deal with the problem of violence, much of which stems from outside the school environment. The Committee believes that the work of schools in the prevention of violence will not be effective unless it is supported by the wider community. The Committee recognises the important role played by government and non government agencies including youth centres and the police in working with schools to prevent violence. It also recognises the positive role the media could play.

3.4. The Committee acknowledges the multi-dimensional factors influencing violent behaviour and the need for management and prevention strategies to address these factors, many of which are complex. There is no single answer for the prevention and management of violent behaviour in schools.

3.5. The Committee was impressed by the level of commitment to behaviour management and prevention of violence of participating schools. Schools participating in the inquiry acknowledged that serious violence among a few students is a reality and programs must be developed for its prevention and management. Schools also acknowledged that the more subtle forms of violence such as verbal or emotional abuse are a reality, which need to be equally acknowledged in the whole school approach to behaviour management. Many schools provided information on programs and policies in place.

3.6. This chapter will examine the legislation and a range of policies and programs currently in place for the management and prevention of violence in schools.

Legislation relating to school discipline

Corporal punishment

3.7. The use of corporal punishment as a means of disciplining students was raised as a concern in evidence at a public hearing.

3.8. From 22 December 1996, the *Education Reform Act 1990* (NSW) will define “corporal punishment of a student” to mean

*the application of physical force in order to correct or punish a student, but does not include the application of force only to prevent personal injury to, or damage to or the destruction of property of, any person (including the student).*³⁶

3.9. Representatives from the Faculty of Education at the University of Canberra stated that corporal punishment in the form of the cane is still used in some schools in the ACT.³⁷

3.10. At present there is no legislation in the ACT which prohibits corporal punishment in schools. Schools are guided by policy decisions. In 1987 the then ACT Schools Authority issued a policy which banned the use of corporal punishment in government schools.

3.11. ACT government policy prohibits the use of corporal punishment by foster carers and in Juvenile Detention Centres. It is also prohibited under the License Conditions for long day care centres, independent preschools, occasional care centres, playschools and out of school hours care.³⁸

3.12. The situation is not so clear for non-government schools. Some have policies which do not permit corporal punishment.

3.13. Common law is unclear as to what corporal punishment is regarded as lawful except that it must be moderate and reasonable.

3.14. It is however clear that the legal consequences of unlawful rendering of corporal punishment are significant. A teacher could be charged with criminal assault and face the possibility of a criminal conviction. If the punishment is found to be both unlawful and to have caused injury to the child it could result in civil liability and financial damages being awarded against the teacher and or the school.

³⁶ Parliament of New South Wales, *Education Reform Amendment (School Discipline) Act 1995*, No 93.

³⁷ Transcript, p 177.

³⁸ Cashmore Judy and de Haas Nicola, *Legal and Social Aspects of the Physical Punishment of Children*, AGPS, Canberra, May 1995, p53.

3.15. In the international context, a 1981 Law Reform Commission report noted that corporal punishment was unlawful in all European countries except the United Kingdom and Eire. In fact its abolition began 300 years ago in Poland and gradually spread to other European countries.³⁹

3.16. The Committee views corporal punishment as inappropriate. The use of corporal punishment by teachers provides a poor example to students about appropriate methods of problem solving. It reinforces the notion that violent behaviour is acceptable. As the Law Reform Commission report *Child Welfare* points out corporal punishment is founded on the false premise that members of our society respond to force and not to reason, which is inconsistent with the values embedded in modern educational practice and a philosophy of education for individual development.

3.17. Further the use of corporal punishment in schools sends mixed messages to the community about appropriate behaviour management practices for children. Child abuse is an issue of great community concern and much has been achieved in recent years by community education programs in raising awareness about the effects of violence towards children on their well being and development. The National Committee on Violence found that the experiences of childhood are paramount in determining whether or not an individual becomes violent in his or her behaviour.⁴⁰ Moreover the ACT Government has announced the proposed date for the commencement of the provision relating to mandatory reporting of child abuse under the *Children's Services Act 1986* is 1 June 1997.

3.18. Recent amendments to the *Education Reform Act 1990* (NSW) will, from 22 December 1996, require government schools to have discipline guidelines and codes which do not permit corporal punishment. Non government schools will be obliged to have official school policies relating to school discipline which do not permit corporal punishment.

3.19. The Committee believes that corporal punishment is not a useful procedure for the resolution of conflict as it models violence and is incompatible with research findings on the importance of non violent conflict resolution.

³⁹ Australian Law Reform Commission, *Child Welfare*, Report No 18, AGPS, Canberra, 1981.

⁴⁰ National Committee on Violence, *Violence: Directions for Australia*, Australian Institute for Criminology, Canberra, 1990.

3.19. The Committee recommends that:

the Government explore the need for non government schools in the ACT to be obliged to have official school policies relating to student discipline that do not permit corporal punishment.

Unwelcome visitors

3.20. In discussions with some high schools the matter of the principal's power to remove unwelcome school visitors was raised. Some schools reported serious problems, such as drug dealing and fights, with visitors to school grounds. One principal suggested changes to the legislation should be considered to give principals the power to order unwelcome visitors from the school environs.

3.21. Under current legislation principals may ask persons to leave a school and its environs, however they do not have the authority to order an unwelcome visitor from the school environs. Because of the potential for confrontation, legalities associated with directing persons to leave school premises, and possible court action that may result, the Department of Education and Training has instructed principals to call the police to remove unwelcome visitors.⁴¹

3.22. The Committee appreciates the problems faced by school principals but believes that giving principals the authority to order unwelcome visitors to leave the school or its environs could place them in a dangerous and difficult position and that this is a matter better dealt with by the police.

Possession of dangerous implements at school

3.23. The Australian Federal Police submitted that changes are needed to the *Education Act 1937* to ban students bringing dangerous implements such as knives to school. In their view principals should also be empowered with search powers to allow a principal or his/her delegate to search the school bag and person of a student if and when the need arises.⁴² The Committee has reservations about the usefulness of such legislative change as it understands legislation already exists which makes it an offence to carry dangerous weapons, such as knives, when there is an intent to harm and believes that search powers should remain with the police.

⁴¹ Department of Education and Training, Circular Minute 16/96.

⁴² Australian Federal Police, *Submission*.

Behaviour management policies

3.24. Both the large school systems, namely, the Department of Education and Training and the Catholic Education Office have in place system wide guidelines or policies on the development of school based student management policies and programs.

3.25. These policies and guidelines cover a range of behaviour management issues. For example, the Department of Education and Training has detailed its guidelines for school policy, implementation of a student management strategy in schools and support mechanisms in the department in its *Management of Student Behaviour: Policy and Implementation Guidelines*. It has also published a number of other documents relevant to behaviour management including *Suspension and Exclusion of Students: Policy and Mandatory Procedures*, and *Policies and Guidelines for Dealing with Sexual Harassment*. School boards are required to develop a school based policy in line with the departmental policies and guidelines.⁴³

3.26. Having a policy in place is however only the beginning. To be effective the policy must be accompanied by a clearly articulated plan together with an ongoing commitment to the approach from staff, students and the community. In other words policy and guidelines must be matched by practice.

3.27. As one high school stated:

Student management must occur within a framework of

- *a relevant education program that meets the needs of all members of the community;*
- *clear school aims and objectives; well organised, well led, mutually supportive and team oriented staff;*
- *a philosophy of awarding students when they demonstrate success at their ability level; and*
- *a school students and staff are happy to go to.*⁴⁴

3.28. The Committee received policies on behaviour management from many schools. Some schools stated they adopted a whole school approach to behaviour management. Analysis of the policies from many others indicates that the concept of a whole school approach has been widely adopted.

⁴³ Department of Education and Training, *Submission*.

⁴⁴ Stromlo High School, *Submission*.

3.29. In its report on violence in Australian schools, entitled '*Sticks and Stones*', the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training identified the following as some of the elements of a whole school approach to student management:

- the provision of a caring environment;
- the establishment of firm behaviour limits where students' rights and responsibilities are clearly stated;
- the implementation of fair and consistent sanctions when rules are transgressed;
- monitoring of children's behaviour both in the classroom and the playground;
- the adoption of a method of 'mediating' poor student behaviour;
- the training of staff in 'mediation'; and
- the encouragement of parental involvement in their children's lives.⁴⁵

3.30. The Committee believes that school behaviour management policies and programs should be oriented towards non punitive action, and include strategies to reduce disruptive behaviour and promote acceptable behaviours. Therefore any plan should show mechanisms for the development of appropriate skills, ensure modelling of acceptable behaviours and include an evaluation component. The Committee strongly supports the whole school approach.

3.31. The Committee was interested in the role of parents in developing and supporting school behaviour management policies. Many submissions and several schools visited by the Committee stated that parents are very interested in behaviour management and are almost always supportive of the school's action in dealing with behaviour problems. When asked, one school indicated that it always notifies the parent/s when a child has perpetrated a violent act and it rarely receives a negative reaction from the parent/s. The Committee found this encouraging.

3.32. In discussions with high school students the Committee was told that there were not effective measures in place for dealing with sexual harassment in many schools.⁴⁶ One student reported that complaints about sexual harassment were not taken seriously by teachers at her school. In the last three years the Department of Education and Training has taken steps to address the issue and noted some significant improvements. However it acknowledges that there is still work to be done to reduce sexual harassment in schools.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Sticks and Stones -Report on Violence in Australian Schools*, AGPS, Canberra, 1994, p 2.

⁴⁶ Discussions at Woden Youth Centre.

⁴⁷ Department of Education and Training, correspondence.

3.33. The Committee was interested to know how the Department of Education and Training determined whether schools complied with its policy to develop and implement a 'management of student behaviour policy'. It was told that schools are required to report annually on policies in place and that the regional Executive Directors Schools are responsible for ensuring that these policies are appropriate. A number of checks and balances are in place such as visits by various non school based professionals like the Executive Director, counsellors and itinerant behaviour management staff.⁴⁸ The Committee is uncertain as to whether the role of all these professionals, especially level one itinerant behaviour management staff, extends to checking on the development and implementation of behaviour management policies in schools.

3.34. The Woden Youth Centre, which has close contact with many schools on the south side of Canberra observed that in its experience not all schools have appropriate policies and programs in place to deal effectively with bullying and violence.⁴⁹

3.35. The Committee contends that the structure of the Department of Education and Training, with devolution of much responsibility to schools, seems to result in the Department not being able to have a centrally based overall picture of the behaviour management policies and programs operating in schools.

School based initiatives and programs

3.36. The Committee observed or received information on a number of school based initiatives which have been implemented. These initiatives are supporting programs, which complement school policies and are some of the elements of a whole school approach to behaviour management. A number of these initiatives are discussed below.

Peer support and buddy programs

3.37. Peer support and buddy programs operate in many schools and are supported by students and staff. These programs involve the older students acting as a support and resource for the younger students and assist in the areas of relationship building, communication and problem solving.

3.38. Peer support programs offer the opportunity to:

- give students a deeper understanding of the skills involved in working with others;
- develop a repertoire of effective interpersonal skills; and

⁴⁸ Transcript, p 53.

⁴⁹ Transcript, p 135.

- develop a more cohesive student body through student leaders working with younger students throughout the school.⁵⁰

Peer support program activities typically involve older students planning and managing special activities for younger students.

Anti-bullying programs

3.39. Many schools have anti-bullying programs in place and the Committee received details of anti-bullying programs at several government and non government schools including Canberra Church of England Girls Grammar School, Marist College, Giralang Primary School, Richardson Primary School and Melrose High School. These programs have been developed in recognition that while programs usually exist to manage more overt acting out behaviours in schools, the more insidious bullying has been neglected. The key features of anti-bullying programs described in submissions to the inquiry include:

- raising awareness of bullying across the whole school community;
- encouraging students to report bullying;
- a commitment by the school to respond to any report of bullying; and
- clearly set out procedures for dealing with the victim and the bully.⁵¹

3.40. Richardson Primary received the 1994 Violence Prevention Award for the ACT for its anti-bullying program. This program involves student identification of bullying, recording by teachers of bullying incidents either observed or reported, regular monitoring and reporting to students of the incidence of bullying and an agreed set of consequences. One of its reported strengths is enabling the issue of bullying to become public. As the school stated:

*Children are free to tell staff that they ‘don’t feel safe’ and seek help. Parents can ring the school to report events knowing that the school will take their concerns seriously and take steps to remedy the situation.*⁵²

3.41. The reported outcomes of the Richardson Primary School program include:

- a significant reduction in bullying;
- a safer playground environment for all children;
- almost total elimination of reports on racist comments;
- the development of more positive ways of solving problems among students who were frequently displaying bullying behaviour; and

⁵⁰ ACT Department of Education and Training ‘Catch Them Doing Something Good! - A Review of Behaviour Management Support Services in the ACT’, 1993.

⁵¹ For example Submissions 14, 16, 22, 31,35.

⁵² Richardson Primary School, Submission.

- the development of an understanding of what constitutes bullying behaviour.

3.42. The Committee believes that bullying is a serious and prevalent form of violence in schools and commends the schools which have taken steps to address the issue. The Committee hopes that more schools will acknowledge the need to address bullying but recognises that often addressing a particular problem is dependent on the will of one or two people with an interest and good skills.

Welfare teams

3.43. The Committee heard about a number of whole school approaches to the management of unacceptable behaviour in high schools. Most of these approaches are similar to the Welfare Team model which is in place in a high school visited by the Committee. At that school the Welfare Team is headed by the principal and includes three senior teachers, who staff the Welfare Room. This room is used for in-school suspensions. The school places an emphasis on internal suspensions rather than suspending students from the school and leaving them to wander the streets. One member of the Welfare Team acts as a home school liaison officer and is responsible for liaison and mediation between the school and the student's family. There is an expectation of behavioural change and resolution of the problem.

3.44. Other schools have established school wide pastoral care/welfare groups involving teachers and supported by school counsellors.

Peer mediation programs

3.45. Mediation has been defined as:

*a process where the participants, together with the assistance of a neutral third party or parties systematically isolate issues, discuss concerns, develop options, consider alternatives and attempt to reach a mutually satisfying solution.*⁵³

3.46. The Resolution Centre describes it as an empowering and enabling process which can be contrasted with other forms of dispute resolution where the third party takes an active role in deciding the outcome for the parties.

3.47. Peer mediation programs involve the recruitment and training of students from the school community to act as mediators in school disputes between other students. It encourages the parties themselves to take responsibility for resolution and lessens the expectation that the problem will be solved by an adult.

⁵³ The Resolution Centre, *Submission*.

3.48. The Resolution Centre noted that research into peer mediation indicates the following possible benefits:

- increased self-esteem on the part of students;
- a reduction in bullying and playground violence;
- less staff time taken up in minor incidents between students;
- increased negotiation and communication skills on the part of students;
- self-development especially for those students selected and trained as mediators; and
- a more 'cooperative culture' within the school community.⁵⁴

3.49. A wide variety of peer mediation models are in place. The Resolution Centre stated that successful programs generally have the following features:

- the commitment of the school community as a whole to implement and support the program;
- high quality training for students, staff and others;
- effective ongoing development, coordination and monitoring;
- well developed policies and protocols including carefully defined boundaries between mediation and discipline; and
- linkages with community based mediation services.⁵⁵

3.50. The Committee was told that such schemes are common overseas, and are widespread throughout Australia. Recently the NSW Department of School Education and the Community Justice Centres of NSW conducted a series of pilot programmes on peer mediation in high school at several locations throughout NSW. An evaluation of this pilot project showed that while it was too early to draw general conclusions about the program's long term outcomes, early results indicated that the model of peer mediation employed appeared to be an effective dispute resolution process in NSW government high schools. The evaluation also highlighted an increased awareness of dispute resolution procedures and pointed out that peer mediation is a resource intensive program.⁵⁶

3.51. Many ACT primary schools have such schemes in place. For example in its submission Richardson Primary School described its 'playground buddy program'. Playground buddies are trained senior students who act as mediators. Their role is to assist and support younger children to solve their problems on the playground. They also note children who play co-operatively and present 'buddy awards' at the weekly school assembly.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Resolution Centre, *Submission*.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ New South Wales Department of School Education, *The Dispute Resolution Pilot Project Report 'Peer Mediation'*, 1995, p 20.

⁵⁷ Richardson Primary School, *Submission*.

3.52. There has also been a great deal of interest in peer mediation in some ACT high schools.⁵⁸ The Resolution Centre reported that it is currently working with one high school to assist in implementing a peer mediation program, and is engaged in discussions with the Department of Education and Training with a view to developing a coordinated scheme throughout the ACT.

3.53. Not all young people are familiar or comfortable with the concept of mediation. The Committee observed a discussion on mediation among a group of young people, who initially greeted the concept with a very negative reaction. As a process, mediation seemed foreign to many of the young people in the group, especially the boys. The general view was that 'hard core' boys would not participate willingly in mediation. Examples of successful mediation processes used in schools were given and as the discussion progressed it was felt that given time, mediation could become a very useful way of resolving conflict in schools.⁵⁹

3.54. The evaluative information available to date indicates that peer mediation has many benefits. The Committee believes that peer mediation has the potential to be a very useful tool in the prevention of violence in schools. Since such programs are relatively new, further evaluation is required to determine the most effective peer mediation programs.

⁵⁸ For example Trinity Christian School, *Submission*.

⁵⁹ Discussions at Woden Youth Centre.

Off-line programs

3.55. Some high schools have initiated ‘off-line’ programs to meet the needs of students who find it difficult to cope with regular classes or the mainstream peer group. These programs offer opportunities for students to learn skills in a small group and a supportive and positive environment. One such program at Stromlo High School has been running successfully for over ten years.

3.56. The Committee visited Stromlo High School and observed its ‘off-line’ program. The school has separate programs for boys and girls. Students can participate in the program on a regular basis for example for specific program lines or on a less frequent basis such as occasions when they are not coping with a particular mainstream class. The activities undertaken by the students are not necessarily the same as those offered in the ‘on-line’ program. Students do undertake their literacy and numeracy programs however at a time of their choosing. The school emphasised that there is no prescribed way to structure an ‘off-line’ program. What works for one school may not meet the needs of another school community.

3.57. Stromlo High School maintains that its ‘off-line’ program has resulted in the participants becoming valued and contributing members of the community rather than potentially de-valued and alienated students who might become prone to violent behaviour.⁶⁰

3.58. The success of ‘off-line’ programs was reported to be dependent on factors such as a relevant structure, stability of staffing, commitment of staff, the program’s physical location, clear procedures about attendance and a shared commitment to a trusting and respectful relationship between students and teachers involved. Success is also highly dependent on the skills and personality of the teachers involved. It was suggested that teachers who show potential for dealing successfully with students not able to cope in the mainstream should be targeted and offered incentives to specialise in this field. The Committee supports this idea.

3.59. The Committee observed that some schools are in a much better position in terms of resources to offer ‘off-line’ programs. For example established schools are generally more able to find a suitable space and additional curriculum materials.

⁶⁰ Stromlo High School Board, *Submission*.

3.60. In discussions with teachers, counsellors and youth workers the Committee found strong support for ‘off-line’ programs to enable high schools to meet the needs of students who are not coping in the mainstream at a particular time. Resources for such programs are a problem and it was suggested that schools need provision of additional teaching points for this purpose.⁶¹

3.61. The Committee believes that the capacity of the curriculum to meet student needs is a key element in the prevention of violence and flexible approaches must be adopted. It also recognises that flexible approaches may be more costly and are dependent on encouraging suitable staff to take on the task and then rewarding them. While ‘off-line’ programs are resource intensive they are providing an alternative to mainstream classes for a group of students who might otherwise leave the system altogether or may need to be accommodated in more expensive programs such as the Dairy Flat program.

3.62. The Committee recommends that:

the Department of Education and Training and Children’s Youth and Family Services Bureau examine ways to further resource ‘off-line’ programs or similar flexible approaches for students not coping in the mainstream. This further resourcing must not be at the expense of existing effective programs.

Police involvement

3.63. Police are involved with schools in a variety of ways.⁶² For example the City District offers safety education to the 34 schools in the district. This program covers all aspects of personal and community safety, including road safety, peer pressure, drug and alcohol abuse and risk taking behaviour. The unit also deals with minor matters which require counselling or a police caution when requested by schools.

3.64. In the Tuggeranong District a system of police liaison officers has been established. Each high school and college has a dedicated police officer attached to it on a part time basis. The Police Liaison Officer visits his/her school regularly as well as attending school functions in their own time. This project has been reported as very successful. An added outcome of the project has been the initiation of “Project Saul” an outdoor adventure camp run by the Tuggeranong police to assist youth who have been coming to notice of the police.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Australian Federal Police, *Submission*.

3.65. There are also two police officers involved in the community policing or Country Town Police program who are closely associated with the schools in their areas. One serves the Ainslie/Campbell area and the other is based at Kaleen. They get to know the community and its problems and difficulties and are able to deal with many issues in a supportive and non threatening way. Some of the advantages of this type of policing are continuity, familiarity with the local issues and the opportunity to develop strong relationships with schools and their communities.⁶³

3.66. The Committee sees value in the involvement in schools of the community police officers and the police liaison officers as they strengthen relationships between the school community and the general community.

3.67. The Australian Federal Police reported that it is also involved in a cooperative venture with the Department of Education and Training to develop a model for an early intervention service for at risk students.

3.68. In informal discussions with the Committee, some students and teachers indicated they were supportive of police involvement in schools.⁶⁴

3.69. The matter of diversionary conferencing was raised with the Committee in informal discussions as well as by the police. While this process is still being evaluated what is already clear is its success is related to appropriate training of officers and how the conference is conducted. A youth worker expressed concern about the appropriateness of diversionary conferencing for serious criminal offences such as sexual assault.

3.70. An issue of concern to the Australian Federal Police is the lack of any clear guidelines or policy about when police should become involved in a situation which arises at a school.⁶⁵ The police pointed out that involvement of the police can avoid later civil ramifications following an incident. For example they suggested that all incidents involving an injury to a person (other than accidents) should be referred to the police. If at a later date the parties were agreeable to settle the matter within the school's own student management program the police advised they have the discretionary power to allow the matter to be handled in that way. Confusion also exists about holding diversionary conferences in schools. The Committee understands that schools may not be involving police because they do not wish to see young people on the police record, however, it believes that the procedures for police involvement in schools need clarification.

⁶³ Uncorrected Proof Transcript, pp 300-324.

⁶⁴ Discussions at Woden Youth Centre.

⁶⁵ Australian Federal Police, *Submission*.

3.71. The Committee recommends that:

the Department of Education and Training and Children's Youth and Family Services Bureau and the Australian Federal Police work together to develop guidelines for the reporting of incidents to the police.

Suspension and exclusion of students

3.72. Suspension or exclusion of a student from school is usually only utilised when all other avenues of dealing with violent behaviour have been exhausted. Suspension is the most common of these measures, with exclusion rarely used.

3.73. With the exception of the Department of Education and Training, the Committee received limited information about suspension and exclusion and will therefore confine its discussion in this section to government schools.

3.74. In its policy the Department of Education and Training defines suspension and exclusion as follows:

Suspension means that a student is required to leave a school and that the student's return is envisaged subject to specified conditions.

Exclusion means that a student's return to an ACT government school is not envisaged.⁶⁶

3.75. In Semester 1 1995 there was a total of 588 suspensions from ACT government schools, the majority from high schools. Seventy five per cent of suspensions in this period were for violent behaviour. Males comprised 80 per cent of total suspensions.

3.76. Suspended students are not allowed to return to their or any other ACT government school during the period of suspension. Further there are no organised activities for them and there may be no intervention by professionals during the period of suspension. Their options are to stay at home, often alone and unsupervised, or wander the streets. Under these circumstances students are unlikely to return to school with new insights or skills and the inappropriate behaviour continues.

3.77. Some high school staff expressed concerns about the current suspension practices where suspended students are virtually thrown out on the streets. The Committee shares these concerns.

⁶⁶ ACT Schools Authority, *Suspension and Exclusion of Students: Policy and Mandatory Procedures*, July 1989.

3.78. Some high schools are using ‘in school’ suspensions as an alternative to suspension when more appropriate.⁶⁷ Another has developed a community service program for students on suspension.⁶⁸

3.79. The Committee believes that greater emphasis needs to be placed on the development of positive interventions for students on suspension, including greater consideration of ‘in school’ suspension.

3.80. The Committee recommends that:

as a matter of urgency the Department of Education and Training and Children’s, Youth and Family Services Bureau develop intervention programs for students on suspension from government schools.

Programs which address gender and violence

3.81. In recent times the relationship between gender and violence has emerged as a major issue for schools and indeed the whole community. While most of the violence in schools is perceived to be caused by boys, a number of studies have now suggested that gender differences in aggression may be qualitative rather than quantitative. For example some forms of bullying such as persistent teasing, isolation from the group and spreading malicious rumours are more prevalent among girls.⁶⁹

3.82. Research relating to sexual harassment in high schools indicates that sexual harassment is almost exclusively a problem of male victimisation of females.⁷⁰ However a researcher at Flinders University in South Australia who is examining interactions between girls has found evidence of sexual harassment of a verbal nature among girls in ‘all girls’ schools.⁷¹ The Committee was interested to note that the Canberra Church of England Girls’ Grammar School has developed a policy and procedures to counter sexual harassment.⁷²

3.83. Increasing pressure is being mounted to address the specific behaviour of boys which can be seen to arise from gender stereotypes in the community. Since most violence in schools is seen to be perpetrated by boys, schools are perceived as having a responsibility to develop programs which address the

⁶⁷ Discussions at Woden Youth Centre.

⁶⁸ ACT Department of Education and Training, *Catch Them Doing Something Good! A review of behaviour management support services in the ACT*, 1993 p 69.

⁶⁹ Owens Laurence D and MacMullin Colin E, ‘Gender Differences in Aggression in Children and Adolescents in South Australian Schools’, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, Vol 6, 1995, pp 21-35.

⁷⁰ S Hinson, *Submission*.

⁷¹ Presentation by Ms Barbara Leckie to a Forum at Flinders University, February 1996.

⁷² Canberra Church of England Girls’ Grammar School, *Submission*.

problem of stereotypic male behaviours which lead to violence. Several schools made reference to this issue but only one school addressed it in any detail. That school⁷³ asserted that appropriate male role models who may be essential to boys' acceptance and adoption of a positive attitude towards education and towards peaceful methods of conflict resolution are not prominent enough in schools.

3.84. The Committee accepts this however believes that it is more than a matter of providing appropriate role models in schools for boys. As the Department of Education and Training⁷⁴ pointed out today's schools need to develop an awareness of the link between gender and violence and the impacts of this dynamic on the experiences and outcomes of schooling for both boys and girls. A principal objective for schools should be developing and maintaining respectful relationships between students. School behaviour management policies and practices should reflect and respond to the different categories of relationships such as girls and girls, boys and boys and girls and boys.

3.85. Further the Department⁷⁵ stated that policies and practices need to be explicit about the centrality of gender stereotyping to issues of violence such as harassment and bullying and go beyond surveillance models of behaviour management. The issues of gender, violence and power in schools need to be addressed across the curriculum. Schools and the community need to work together to effectively deal with the issue.

3.86. The Committee believes that the most successful way to address the issues of gender and violence is through a whole school approach which assists the school community to identify, examine and challenge the nature of relationships and school culture which lead to some behaviours, such as sexual harassment, homophobic behaviours, spreading of malicious rumours and bullying being seen as 'gender appropriate'. The Committee understands that addressing some of these issues can be difficult. Involving community organisations with expertise and experience in these matters can be useful.

3.87. In addressing one form of gender related violence, namely, sexual harassment, evidence has been received indicating that many schools are developing comprehensive programs and taking the issue seriously.

3.88. Department of Education and Training schools are required to develop and implement anti-sexual harassment programs in accordance with departmental policy. All schools are required to appoint sexual harassment contact officers, who are trained to receive and deal with complaints of sexual

⁷³ Hughes Primary School Board, *Submission*.

⁷⁴ Department of Education and Training, Correspondence dated 13 February 1996.

⁷⁵ *ibid*

harassment. These measures are a good start, however the Committee believes that much more is required to eliminate this form of violence.

3.89. To assist schools in dealing with gender related violence the Committee's attention was drawn to two specific programs. The first the 'No Fear' kit produced by the Department of Employment, Education and Training, comprises professional development and curriculum resources for both primary and secondary settings. The other, 'Enough's Enough' is a program produced by the Queensland Department of Education which relies heavily on a whole school approach and involves staff and students in examining and challenging the nature of violence in their schools and society. It highlights the importance of identifying specific curriculum areas where teaching and learning about gender construction, power and issues such as homophobia and sexual harassment can occur.

3.90. 'One-off' programs delivered by outside agencies are also of value. Programs described later in this chapter such as PAIR and those offered by Youth Centres, for example, cannot achieve the same shift in culture as a whole school approach but they have been shown to be of benefit to the groups of students or individuals exposed to them. Such programs can supplement or complement other work being done.

3.91. The Committee was concerned by the extent of learning problems reported among boys and the relationship between poor learning outcomes and violence. Gender equity programs have done much to ensure equal educational opportunities for girls. Some claim that the needs of boys have been overlooked in the context of gender equity and that it is time to address their specific needs. The Committee accepts that a greater focus should be placed on the needs of boys in gender equity programs and that learning problems among boys require urgent intervention. However it believes that any new programs to address the behaviour of boys should not be resourced at the expense of existing programs, in particular those which address sexual harassment or programs focusing on equity for female students.

Non competitive recreational activities

3.92. The value of non competitive recreational activities was acknowledged. Such activities include non competitive sporting activities, such as outdoor education programs, opportunities for self expression in a non competitive environment through the arts, such as dance, music, drama and craft.

3.93. Outdoor education programs include a range of outdoor experiences from short environment walks to major expeditions. The Committee was told that in comparison to competitive sport, outdoor education provides young people with a strong physical outlet, without the risk of it spilling over into aggressive behaviour.

3.94. Outdoor education programs are also reported to be of assistance in preventing violent or aggressive behaviour. One of the reasons for their success is that students are not placed in a competitive position, but rather work together in a cooperative way which requires trust and facilitates development of social skills.⁷⁶

3.95. Anecdotal evidence suggests that value of non competitive activities is not always accepted and that especially in high schools some students are forced into competitive activities. The Committee would like to see a fostering of co-operative activities and greater recognition of the value of non competitive sport and other activities in schools.

3.96. The Committee recommends that:

schools place greater emphasis and value on non competitive recreational and sporting activities and provide a better balance between competitive and non competitive activities.

Special intervention programs

3.97. The Department of Education and Training provides an itinerant student management consultant service and operates a number of student support units (withdrawal units) for students who display behaviour of such a serious nature that their own safety and the safety of others is a risk.

⁷⁶ Transcript, p 128.

3.98. The aim of the itinerant student management service is to provide school-based support for students who require assistance additional to that outlined in school policies or recommended by special needs teams. These teachers visit schools to assist with program development for students. Many of the students assisted in this way are on the waiting list for placement in a withdrawal unit.

3.99. The aim of the withdrawal programs is to encourage and support behaviour change in students, so that they may be reintegrated into their home school. Statistics provided by the Department indicate that a high proportion of students referred to withdrawal units had exhibited violent behaviour. These programs are outlined below.

Primary programs

3.100. Two programs are available for primary students namely the Yarralumla Centre Program which is co-located at Yarralumla Primary School and a pilot program co-located at Urambi Primary School. Enrolments in the primary unit are almost exclusively boys.

3.101. Twelve students attend the Yarralumla Centre, which is staffed by three teachers, 0.5 of a counsellor and two teacher assistants. Students come from all over Canberra.

3.102. The Pilot Early Intervention Program catering for four students aged between five and seven at Urambi Primary School commenced during the second semester of 1995 and continues in 1996 for students from schools in the Tuggeranong Valley. It is based on research reported in '*A developmental and clinical model for the prevention of conduct disorder: the FAST Track program, 1992*', which indicates that students under the age of seven years have a 78 per cent expectation of behaviour change compared with the expectation for older students where the rate of potential behaviour change drops significantly to below 25 per cent. This program is staffed by one teacher and one teacher assistant.

3.103. The provision of resources for the primary programs appeared problematic.⁷⁷ The Committee raised this matter with the department, which stated that it expected to make changes to the process of allocation of materials following a review.⁷⁸ The Committee believes that the department has a responsibility to ensure the primary programs are adequately resourced with suitable educational materials and will monitor the department's progress in improving the arrangements.

⁷⁷ Discussions with staff, September 1995.

⁷⁸ Department of Education and Training, Correspondence dated 14 December 1995.

3.104. Students up to age eight are transported to the primary programs by taxi. In November 1995, the cost of taxi transport was \$120 per day.⁷⁹ On a per capita basis the costs of transporting students from the Tuggeranong Valley to the Urambi program were considerably less than those for students going to the Yarralumla program.

3.105. Those over eight make their own way to the centre either by public transport or private car. This can involve considerable distances and time in some instances, for example, from North Belconnen to Yarralumla.

3.106. The Committee is concerned about the distance some students are required to travel as it believes that it places additional stress on the students, decreases the amount of class time available in the day and in the case of the younger students is very costly.

3.107. The Department of Education and Training reported that the waiting list for the primary programs is usually about eight however this has been reduced with the establishment of the Urambi pilot program. Waiting time averages six to eight months, which is a concern to the Committee.

3.108. Time spent in the primary program varies with need and can be six weeks to over one year.

3.109. Several submissions from primary schools complained about a shortage of behaviour management consultants and consequential long waiting times for support in dealing with students exhibiting violent behaviour or placement of a student in a withdrawal program.⁸⁰

3.110. The Committee was advised that one of the reasons for the long waiting time for placement in a withdrawal unit is the lack of any alternative facility for primary students with severe disruptive behaviour or emotional disturbance. Since there is no alternative for these students they remain in the unit for a longer time than is desired.⁸¹

3.111. The primary programs are designed to teach students to accept responsibility for their own behaviour in both school and the wider community and students are encouraged to critically analyse their own behaviour in order to make appropriate behaviour choices. Staff work closely with mainstream schools to facilitate the reintegration process so that students may return to the home school as quickly as is feasible for the benefit of all stakeholders.⁸²

⁷⁹ Department of Education and Training, Correspondence dated 28 November 1995.

⁸⁰ For example *Submissions 10, 23, 31*.

⁸¹ Discussions at Student Support Units.

⁸² Department of Education and Training, *Submission*.

3.112. Students are 'owned' by their home mainstream school and participate in a weekly reintegration program. One day per week is set aside for reintegration and on this day no student is able to attend the primary program. In some instances students reintegrate for the full day, while in others they may attend for part of the day depending on their behaviour. Staff from the units support students with reintegration. As the student demonstrates he/she is capable of coping with more days in the mainstream school the number of reintegration days per week is increased.

3.113. Responsibility for the care of students who are only able to cope with very short periods or no reintegration on reintegration day rests with the family as the unit is closed. The Committee finds this unsatisfactory.

3.114. The success of reintegration depends on a number of factors including support from the family, the home school and withdrawal unit staff as well as the capacity of the student to adapt to a large class (of up to 30 compared with four).

3.115. The Committee was not convinced that the reintegration program is working as effectively as it could. The Committee was told that there is increasing concern about the number of students who are becoming long term placements because reintegration is not working. The reintegration program also sometimes falls down when the student exits the withdrawal unit and reintegrates full time. A major factor in the problems with reintegration is inadequate support structures both in the schools and from the itinerant program.

3.116. The Department of Education and Training acknowledged that it is not entirely happy with the reintegration program and that it has plans to address the problem, particularly in relation to support structures.⁸³ The Committee will monitor the department's progress with the required improvements.

3.117. Given the costs and difficulties with transport, difficulties with reintegration and the long waiting period for placement, the Committee would like to see the adoption of a more flexible approach to the provision of withdrawal units for primary students. This could be achieved through a decentralised model, which is responsive to regional needs and includes more support to schools to enable them to manage students with behavioural problems in the mainstream.

⁸³ Transcript, p 28.

3.118. The Committee recommends that:

the Department of Education and Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau examine more flexible and localised models of delivery of behaviour management support and withdrawal programs for primary school students.

Secondary programs

Adolescent Development Program

3.119. The Adolescent Development Program at Dairy Flat was established to provide support to high school students who may be experiencing severe behavioural, emotional, educational or social difficulty. The program is based on the provision of teaching and learning experiences which are practical and which are individualised for each student.

3.120. The student capacity for the Adolescent Development Program is twelve. There are three teachers, 0.5 of a counsellor and a youth worker employed in the program. The average time students wait to access the program is between four and six months. The time spent in the program fluctuates, but on average is between six months to one year.

3.121. In discussions with high school staff the Committee was told that the number of places available in the Adolescent Development Program is grossly inadequate given that this is the only alternative placement available for students with violent behaviour. The importance of appropriate intervention is well recognised and the Committee is extremely concerned by this situation.

3.122. Currently, a major focus of the program is reintegration to school. As with the primary program reintegration in the home school is part of the weekly program. However, the Department acknowledges that this may not be the most appropriate path for some students and transition to work is increasing as a viable option for some students.

3.123. Programs for students who are not able to successfully reintegrate still appear to be very limited and unsatisfactory. This issue was raised in the Department of Education and Training's review of behaviour management support services '*Catch Them Doing Something Good*',⁸⁴ conducted in 1993. The review identified a small number of students of compulsory school age requiring a less formal more vocationally oriented learning environment and suggested that the Department of Education and Training explore the

⁸⁴ op cit p 65.

possibility of these students participating in programs such as TAFE courses or community based vocationally oriented programs. The review also suggested that formal enrolment in the New South Wales Distance Education Program be considered for some of the very small number of students unable to reintegrate.

3.124. The Committee acknowledges that staff of the Adolescent Development Program are meeting the needs of most students within the constraints of the program. The Committee however believes that alternative programs for students unable to reintegrate need urgent consideration.

3.125. The Committee recommends that:

the Department of Education and Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau arrange for the participation in appropriate alternative educational and life skills programs for students unable to reintegrate into mainstream schools, especially students under 15 years of age.

Adolescent Day Unit

3.126. The Adolescent Day Unit is a day program that offers intensive specialist support for six adolescents aged from 12 to 15 who have severe disruptive behaviour or emotional disturbance of sufficient severity to prevent attendance at school. The unit provides assessment and support through individually tailored programs. Assistance is provided to encourage reintegration into regular schooling. Attendance at the unit is usually for 2 terms. The program is resourced with a director, a psychologist, 2 youth workers and 0.5 of a teaching position a total of 4.5 staff for 6 students.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Department of Education and Training, *Submission* and discussions at the Adolescent Day Unit.

Community based programs and initiatives

3.127. Many programs are school based and have a school focus, however they are not merely limited to teachers and students. They often involve parents and the most effective programs involve the whole community. Teachers however well skilled and trained, cannot be expected to deal with all the issues related to violence in schools. Teachers do need to deal with the symptoms and causes which are manifested at school but cannot be expected to deal with the whole range of causes, many of which are wider community issues.

3.128. The Committee received information on many community based programs which schools are able to tap into to raise student awareness of violence in the community and to develop strategies for dealing with problems in a non violent way.

3.129. Such programs supplement and complement the school curriculum and include:

- programs for boys run by the Woden and Belconnen Youth Centres;
- Preventing Abuse in Relationships (PAIR), which is offered by the Domestic Violence Crisis Service to high schools;
- Men Against Sexual Assault (MASA) programs;
- Girls at Risk Program run by the Tuggeranong Youth Centre;
- parenting programs;
- anger and violence workshops run by such organisations as Belconnen Youth Centre, Woden Youth Centre, LASA and Weston Creek Youth Centre;
- theatrical performances and workshops; and
- mediation and conflict resolution program development supported by the Resolution Centre.

3.130. The PAIR program is a good example of the effective use of the expertise and specialist skills of a community organisation. PAIR was endorsed by the ACT Department of Education and Training and aimed to address the issues of gender and violence in ACT high schools.

3.131. This program is usually run in single sex groups with the Domestic Violence Crisis Service workers dealing with the girls and Men Against Sexual Assault (MASA) or male workers from youth centres dealing with the boys.

3.132. An evaluation of the program indicated that students felt the program would help reduce the levels of violence in the community. Other important features of the program for students were: single sex groups; the involvement of outside experts rather than teachers in the program delivery; and ensuring a safe and confidential environment for these issues to be discussed.⁸⁶

3.133. Funding for such programs always seems to be a constraining factor. Initial funding for the PAIR program was provided under the National Strategy on Violence against Women. Funding constraints since then have meant that the program was only able to be offered on a limited basis in 1995. However the Committee was advised that funding has been made available from the Community Safety Committee to enable the program to be offered in 1996.⁸⁷

3.134. Specialised programs such as those offered by Youth Centres on issues such as anger management and young men's issues provide a valuable alternative to mainstream programs for a group of students and in some circumstances perform a similar role to school based 'off-line' programs. The Committee was told that these programs are in great demand by high schools and referral of some students to the Youth Centre programs is assisting them to deal with behavioural issues and preventing suspension. High quality programs offered by Youth Centres can be more effective than school based programs, where, given the average age of teachers in the government schools is 46, the generational gap between teachers and students can be a barrier. Given the paucity of school based 'off-line' programs Youth Centre programs are filling a much needed gap and deserve support.

3.135. During its visit to Adelaide the Committee met with two theatre groups which are part of the South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services' Artists in Schools Program. The first, *Restless Dance Company*, provides opportunities for self expression through dance for young people with an intellectual disability. Participation in the company's programs provides an opportunity for these young people to express their feelings and to perform publicly.

3.136. The second a puppeteer, fully trained in protective behaviours, supports school based programs on protective behaviours with specially written puppet shows. Both these programs can serve as a vehicle for going through some of the processes on how to handle a situation as well as providing avenues for self expression.

⁸⁶ Domestic Violence Crisis Service, *Submission*.

⁸⁷ Transcript, p 180.

3.137. The Committee was also interested in the workshop program for schools which is being developed in the ACT by the Jigsaw Theatre Company. These workshops are aimed at addressing some of the curriculum issues requested by schools, such as bullying or personal development as well as some of the art forms required by their funding agreement. Jigsaw reported that it has been overwhelmed with requests since it first advertised the workshop program late in 1995.⁸⁸ The Committee was impressed by this initiative.

3.138. The value of parenting programs in the prevention of violence was mentioned in several submissions. Parenting programs are conducted by specially trained people and are facilitated by community organisations as well as schools. The Committee heard differing views on the availability of parenting programs ranging from an over to an under supply.

3.139. The Committee believes that family support programs such as parenting programs are extremely valuable in assisting parents to develop appropriate parenting skills, which in turn assists in the prevention of some violence. The need for family support programs is discussed further in the next chapter.

3.140. It was acknowledged in evidence that part of a best practice model in preventing and dealing with violence in schools is the use of skills and expertise available in community organisations. The Committee was told that while schools are keen to make use of such programs, because many effective community programs are under resourced, the organisations are not always able to meet the needs.⁸⁹

3.141. Further, the opportunity to involve community groups in program delivery for government high schools and colleges is constrained on two levels by the requirement that a teacher be present. This requirement can constrain the level of student participation and their willingness to openly discuss an issue as well as tie up valuable teacher resources. This is a legal issue which needs to be resolved to ensure the skills of community groups can be effectively used. The Committee was encouraged by the Department of Education and Training's commitment to resolve this matter.⁹⁰

Evaluation of programs

3.142. Much of the information received by the Committee on school based and community programs addressing violence in schools also included some evaluative information.

⁸⁸ Transcript, p 160.

⁸⁹ Transcript, p 104.

⁹⁰ Transcript, p 150.

3.143. Several schools reported that they keep detailed records of the incidence of violence which are used as a baseline for assessing the effects of programs for the prevention of violence.

3.144. Information on the evaluation of specific programs was also presented in some submissions, for example the anti-bullying projects at Richardson Primary School and St Edmunds College and the Preventing Abuse in Relationships Program (PAIR) implemented in a number of ACT high schools by the Domestic Violence Crisis Service.

3.145. As part of its cyclical School Performance Review and Development program, the Department of Education and Training undertakes a systematic examination of the key aspects of its operations and educational outcomes for the purpose of school improvement and future planning. As part of this process perceptions of school safety from student, parent and staff perspectives are assessed.⁹¹ This provides a general overview.

3.146. What appears to be missing is a school by school picture of the extent of violence in schools which could be used as a basis of comparison in determining changes in the level of violence and the effectiveness of policies and programs.

3.147. Many schools are including evaluation as a routine when implementing programs for the prevention of violence and the Committee applauds this. There was however, evidence to suggest that unfortunately some programs are not being properly evaluated.

⁹¹ Department of Education and Training, *Submission*.

4. GAPS IN SERVICES

Early intervention

4.1. The Committee is concerned that evidence it has received indicates a significant increase in the occurrence of violent behaviour among very young students. Primary schools have reported an increasing level of violent behaviour among kindergarten students and the preschool sector was significantly concerned about the problem to seek Commonwealth funding for a behaviour management itinerant teacher position in preschools. This program operated as a pilot in 1995 and has been extended for 1996.⁹²

4.2. In its submission, the Department of Education and Training discussed the comparative success rates of intervention programs for children under seven and older children. It quoted research reported in '*A Developmental and Clinical Model for the Prevention of Conduct Disorder: the FAST Track Program 1992*' which indicates that students under the age of seven years have a 78 per cent expectation of behaviour change compared with the expectation for older students where the rate of potential behaviour change drops significantly to below 25 per cent.⁹³ The Urambi withdrawal program is based on this research.

4.3. The Australian Education Union also stressed the importance of early intervention. In evidence to the Committee their representative stated:

*It is far, far easier to deal with these issues when children are young. They can progress through their schooling and become successful citizens in our community if the intervention is done at an early stage.*⁹⁴

4.4. The Committee believes sufficient evidence exists to suggest that there is a relationship between violent behaviour and low levels of literacy and numeracy. As an experienced teacher with considerable expertise in behaviour management stated:

*There is only one common factor I have ever found in the five years I have worked with kids with behaviour disorder - they are all learning failures.*⁹⁵

⁹² Transcript, p 63.

⁹³ Department of Education and Training *Submission*.

⁹⁴ Transcript, p 79.

⁹⁵ Transcript, p 45.

4.5. It is therefore essential that intervention programs at any level, but particularly in the early years, include a focus on the development of basic skills.

4.6. When asked about the educational outcomes of the withdrawal units the Department of Education and Training acknowledged that it has not placed sufficient emphasis on intensive remedial programs in numeracy and literacy at the units. It is moving to address this issue.⁹⁶

4.7. The Committee was advised of an urgent need for a specialised early intervention program for children under 12 with disruptive behaviour or emotional disturbance of sufficient severity to prevent attendance at school. The withdrawal units are not resourced to deal with such students who need specialised therapeutic care. Options suggested to meet this need included the establishment of a Child Day Unit along similar lines to the Adolescent Day Unit or a family-centred short term residential facility. The Committee believes that urgent action needs to be taken to fill this gap.

4.8. Several organisations stressed that resourcing of early intervention programs must not be to the detriment of programs for older children, for example, adolescents with violent behaviour. While a significant proportion of students with behaviour disorders are identified at a young age, some do not display violent behaviour until they reach adolescence. The influences on behaviour are wide ranging and include changes in family relations, medical conditions and changes in available support, which can occur at any time in a child's life.

4.9. The Committee accepts that early intervention will not solve all violent behaviour. In the long term, a greater commitment to early intervention should result in some decrease in the need for programs for older students. In the meantime additional resources will need to be provided to ensure the availability of early intervention programs and the continuation of the necessary programs for older students with violent behaviour.

4.10. The Committee recommends that:

the Government give priority to the maintenance of existing early intervention programs and the establishment of further programs to deal with students at risk including a therapeutic program to meet the needs of children with severe disruptive behaviour or emotional disturbance. Such programs should offer opportunities for parental involvement. They should not be to the detriment of programs for older students.

⁹⁶ Transcript, p 45.

4.11. At the broader community level it is essential that we continue to address violence in the home, such as child abuse and spouse abuse if the cycle of violence is to be broken.

4.12. As pointed out in Chapter 2 violence is a community problem, not a problem confined to schools. Therefore it must also be addressed at the community level.

4.13. The Committee's first report *Social Policy Issues Raised by Community Groups- April 1995*, examined the question of family support services and found that community organisations such as the Community Services, Lifeline and Barnados were all of the view that there is a need for more adequate family support services to assist families in difficulty and to help prevent violence in the home.⁹⁷ Support required included; subsidised child care to provide respite and support to families in crisis or at risk, who are not in the workforce; the availability of family support workers in the home; and parent education programs which cover such issues as age appropriate strategies for managing a child's behaviour. At that time it was also pointed out that the planned introduction of mandatory reporting of child abuse needs to be supported with preventative measures such as education, counselling and support for families.

4.14. In addition the 1990 report of the National Committee on Violence, *Violence: Directions for Australia*, observed child development and the influence of family to be a crucial factor contributing to the risk of violence. The report points out:

Families constitute the training ground for aggression. It is within the family that aggressive behaviours are first learned; to the extent that families fail to instil non-violent values in their children, those children will be more likely to develop a repertoire of violent behaviours as they negotiate life in society at large.

*There are correlations between aggression in children and certain characteristics in their parents, notably maternal rejection and parental use of physical punishment and threat.*⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Standing Committee on Social Policy, *Social Policy Issues Raised by Community Groups - April 1995*, ACT Legislative Assembly, p 12.

⁹⁸ National Committee on Violence, *Violence: Directions for Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1990.

4.15. The National Committee on Violence made several recommendations relating to the provision of family support programs such as parent education, parent training in controlling aggressive behaviour, support for new parents and better coordination and communication between agencies providing services to victims of violence.

4.16. The recent reopening of public discussion on the findings of the National Committee on Violence and the evidence gathered by this inquiry have confirmed that the situation has not changed and there is still an urgent need for additional family support services to ensure early intervention.

4.17. The Committee recommends that:

- **the Government develop a strategy for the provision of family support services, such as parental training and education programs and intervention programs for families at risk;**
- **the Government develop a publicity campaign which will encourage families to seek assistance as soon as difficulties are encountered.**

Case management

4.18. Case management in the ACT has been a vexed issue for as long as many people can remember!

4.19. Individual organisations such as the Catholic Education Office or the Department of Education and Training have mechanisms in place to deal with issues which can be handled within the organisation.

4.20. For example, in its schools the Department of Education and Training has established Special Needs Teams with the responsibility for the development of individual, whole class and whole school behaviour management programs for individual students. These teams comprise the principal, class teacher, student welfare staff and counsellor.⁹⁹

4.21. Schools administered by the Catholic Education Office are supported by specialist centrally based staff and social workers from Centacare, who assist principals, staff, parents and students through counselling, involvement in policy preparation and class group presentations within peer support structures.^{100 101}

4.22. The problems with case management begin to become evident when schools need to call on outside government agencies for assistance. The Committee is continually hearing of problems with case management from community agencies, schools and individuals.

4.23. There is a growing community expectation that schools should be responsible for solving problems of violent behaviour. However as many schools and organisations reported, the violent behaviour exhibited at school is often a symptom of a far greater and more wide reaching problem which requires addressing at the community level.¹⁰²

4.24. The primary role of schools is educational. Yet the Australian Education Union pointed out that in recent years teachers have been required to fill an increasing welfare/counsellor role. This work is stressful, very time consuming and takes teachers away from their primary role, namely teaching.¹⁰³

4.25. In addition teachers do not have the training and skills to deal with complex problems of violent behaviour.

⁹⁹ Department of Education and Training, *Submission*.

¹⁰⁰ Catholic Education Office, *Submission*.

¹⁰¹ Transcript, p 71.

¹⁰² For example *Submissions*, 12,14, 16.

¹⁰³ Australian Education Union, *Submission*.

4.26. The Committee is of the view that schools should not be expected to and cannot solve the problem of violent behaviour alone. There comes a time when a problem can be beyond the resources and skills available in a school and outside professional assistance is required. Such assistance is required for a small proportion of students with current estimates being one per cent of the student population.

4.27. The Woden School, a school for secondary students with an intellectual disability highlighted some of the difficulties faced by special schools and suggested a case management model to meet its needs. In its submission it stated:

Our experience has shown that students demonstrating extreme violence at school are usually a problem for the wider community. These students will probably have the involvement of a case worker from Family Services. These workers are often overworked and cannot manage the case effectively. Frequent changes of case workers add to the complexity of management and often it is the school which has the historical information concerning the student and, in reality, the school is managing the case.

A more effective method of managing these cases would be to have a social worker based at the school rather than at a regional office. The school would then have one case worker to manage the cases for the whole school. Currently The Woden School has sixteen students with Family Services case workers, this is 20% of the student population.

4.28. The Woden School has a higher percentage of students requiring assistance from outside agencies than most schools. Such an approach would certainly streamline case management for students and families of this school but may not ensure an integrated as well as a coordinated approach.

4.29. In 1991 the then Standing Committee on Social Policy conducted an *Inquiry into Behavioural Disturbance among Young People*. Lack of coordination of case management was a significant issue addressed. That Committee examined the South Australian interagency referral process model and recommended that:

the Government establish an interdepartmental Committee to develop and implement an interagency referral process for young people with behavioural disturbance;

the interagency referral process be developed and implemented first for school aged students and in the second stage be extended to include all children and young people with behavioural disturbance.

4.30. Despite the need for an interagency referral process being clearly identified and supported in 1991, until very recently little has occurred to improve case management for young people with behavioural disturbance in the ACT.

4.31. The South Australian interagency referral process model has now been in operation across the State since 1991 and has proved most effective. It provides a mechanism for ensuring an integrated, holistic approach to case management and review of health, education and welfare services for the school aged population with serious social and behavioural difficulties. This is reported to be approximately one per cent of students.¹⁰⁴ The success of the model is dependent on commitment to a shared responsibility by participating agencies. The model is recognised internationally to be at the forefront of intersectoral work.

4.32. Essentially the model streamlines the referral process and ensures that the government agencies responsible for health, education and welfare services in each region take joint responsibility for assessing each referral and ensuring effective case management. Referrals are made to a designated position in each agency, for example in the Department for Education and Children's Services, referrals are made to the area Interagency Referral Manager. Parental permission is obtained to allow information to be shared among agencies when appropriate. Each referral is then considered by the area Interagency Referral Group, which comprises the person responsible for referrals from the Departments of Health, Education and Family and Community Services. A case manager is appointed for each referral by the Interagency Referral Group, which regularly monitors progress with the case.

4.33. In addition to the Interagency Referral Group there is a State Interagency Committee, which oversees the use of interagency resources and an area Interagency Implementation Committee in each of the regions, which monitors and evaluates the process at a regional level.

4.34. During the inquiry the Committee visited South Australia and had discussions with officers of the Department for Education and Children's Services involved in the Interagency Referral Process. There are many similarities in the structures for the management of students with behavioural

¹⁰⁴ State Interagency Committee, *Final Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations from the Interagency Responses Report (Stratmann, 1988)*, Report to the Chief Executive Officers and Ministers, South Australia, October 1992.

problems between South Australia and the ACT. As already mentioned all referrals from the Department for Education and Children's Services schools are directed to the department's regional Interagency Referral Manager. Referrals include all students excluded under the 'School Discipline Policy' as well as those for whom school based intervention from the behaviour management support team has not been effective. These students are usually placed in a Learning Centre, which is a withdrawal unit similar to the ACT's Student Support Units. Each student is assigned a case manager, who reports regularly to the Interagency Referral Group.

4.35. The Committee visited a Catholic school in South Australia which has successfully developed a local integrated referral process. Catholic schools are not part of the Department for Education and Children's Services' Interagency Referral Process. This school, Holy Family at Parafield has implemented a program called 'CARE', which arranges and coordinates support for identified children and their families. The CARE group is made up of professionals with a range of skills and experience. The CARE group meets twice a term to discuss referrals. The Committee was told that now the CARE program is established a significant amount of time is saved by the school in arranging support for children and families.

4.36. The Committee believes that an interagency referral process model is urgently required in the ACT and is pleased to note that since the inception of this inquiry plans to improve case management in the ACT have been announced.

4.37. In March 1996 the ACT Department of Education and Training advised the Committee of details of plans to implement an interagency referral and case management process for 'at risk' young people between the ages of 5 and 18 years. This initiative is to be known as *Youth Connection: Student/Youth Coordinating Service (District)*. The Department of Education and Training has been the major force behind the development of the service. The inclusion of the Children's Youth and Family Service Bureau in the department has been a major catalyst to interagency cooperation.

4.38. *Youth Connection: Student/Youth Coordinating Service (District)* is expected to be operational by May 1996.

4.39. The goals of the service are to:

- provide a preventative, complementary professional service for young people in partnership with families/caregivers and school communities where young people are experiencing severe social/behavioural difficulties;
- identify and develop strategies where change is required to improve the situation for young people;
- assist young people to develop solutions and take responsibility for their actions;
- assist school communities in the understanding and management of a young person's situation; and
- maintain young people in school or educational provision and assist young people where this is necessary to access education.

4.40. The service will be structured on three levels, similar to the South Australian model. The proposed structure is as follows:

- a District Committee, which will operate in each ACT School District;
- a small overarching committee comprising representatives from the Department of Education and Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau and the Department of Health and Community Care; and
- a whole of government committee, which will monitor interagency developments in the ACT.¹⁰⁵

4.41. District Committees will comprise the Executive Director Schools, the District Referral Manager (the District Executive Officer who will take on this responsibility), the Senior Counsellor, the Youth Worker, a representative from Family Services, Health and Community Care, and the Student Support Section, the referrer and relevant coopted members from government and non government agencies.

4.42. Youth workers from the Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau will play a key role in accessing young people at risk, working directly with the young people and their families and liaising with home, school and agencies.

4.43. The success of the service will be dependent on a commitment from all agencies involved to ensure that their representative on the District Committee has the authority to make decisions at the meetings, is consistent in attendance and is committed to acting on the Committee's decisions. Success will also be dependent on the availability of sufficient services to which clients can be referred.

¹⁰⁵ Department of Education and Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau, *Youth Connection: Student/Youth Coordinating Service (District)*, Draft Paper, March 1996, p 2.

4.44. The overarching committee will review referral trends and play a role in forward planning and resource allocation.

4.45. The whole of government committee will monitor interagency activities across the ACT and act as a reference point for information.

4.46. This is an exciting initiative for the ACT and the Department of Education and Training is to be congratulated for its efforts in setting it up. It is not anticipated that any additional resources will be required, in fact in the long term it should be much more efficient and effective than the current uncoordinated arrangements.

4.47. As with any new initiative there will no doubt be some problems. Progress will need to be reviewed regularly to iron out difficulties. The Committee believes that the service should be allowed time to become established and that a full evaluation should be conducted after the first year of operation of the service.

4.48. The Committee recommends that

Youth Connection: Student/Youth Coordinating Service (District) be evaluated after one year of operation and the report be provided to the Assembly.

5. TRAINING AND SUPPORT

5.1. The need for effective training and support for teachers in behaviour management together with adequate resourcing was addressed by the majority of submissions.

Training

5.2. Training includes both preservice and inservice training.

Preservice training

5.3. Schools are becoming more and more inclusive and as a result needing to have the expertise to deal with students with a very wide range of needs including learning and behavioural difficulties.

5.4. Many submissions expressed the view that a greater emphasis is needed on preservice training in behaviour management.¹⁰⁶ The following comment from Melrose Primary School reflects the views of many organisations who gave evidence.

*It is essential that teaching staff have suitable training in behaviour management techniques. At the present time this is not a compulsory subject in teacher education.*¹⁰⁷

5.5. Some academics are challenging the content of training programs for teachers and suggesting that that they need to take a different form.

5.6. Some assert that training that emphasises cognitive psychology and behaviouristic management techniques is limited in equipping teachers with skills to deal with emotionally complex behaviour. Further because violence and bullying are complex problems which generally originate beyond the school, training programs alone cannot be expected to solve the problem.¹⁰⁸

5.7. Others stress the need for teacher training to develop skills to equip teachers to model non-violent patterns of communication and conflict resolution.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ For example, *Submission 10, 11, 20.*

¹⁰⁷ Melrose Primary School, *Submission.*

¹⁰⁸ House of Representatives, *Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 'Violence in Australian Schools' 1993-94, Submissions to the Inquiry* p 30, p 489.

¹⁰⁹ Slee, R. *Discipline in Australian Public Education: Changing Policy and Practice*, The Australian Council for Educational Research, Hawthorn, Victoria, 1992.

5.8. The University of Canberra advised that currently lectures/workshops on classroom management are integral to its teacher education program. In addition, it offers an elective unit 'Behaviour Disorders in Home and School', which is completed by a large number of students.¹¹⁰ The University acknowledged the need for classroom teachers to be adequately prepared to deal with problem behaviour in the classroom and playground. The Committee was pleased to hear the University is moving towards including the now elective unit as a core part of the new course.¹¹¹

5.9. The Committee was also told that there is a need for preservice training to include at least one compulsory unit on special education to give teachers a basic understanding of how to deal with students with special needs in a mainstream classroom.¹¹² Although the Committee did not explore this issue further it is clear that teachers are now required to deal with a wide range of student needs and follows that they may need more specialised training to equip them for this task.

Inservice training and support for programs

5.10. Ongoing professional development for teachers working in schools is essential to enable them to build on their classroom expertise and to develop a culture which deals with conflict and frustration in a non violent way. Opportunities for professional development in behaviour management were reported to be limited.

5.11. The Department of Education and Training, the Catholic Education Office and many of the independent schools submitting to the inquiry provided information on their inservice training and support programs. Some programs are conducted jointly by education agencies in the city.

5.12. These programs include training in conflict resolution, behaviour management program development, classroom and student management, mediation and Professional Assault Response Training.

5.13. Professional Assault Response Training (PART), provides a comprehensive and systematic approach to the understanding and management of violent behaviour. It focuses both on safety and on the rights of students and staff using legally acceptable strategies. The Department of Education and Training has provided the opportunity for representatives from all government schools in the ACT to access the program.

¹¹⁰ University of Canberra, *Submission*.

¹¹¹ Transcript, p 175.

¹¹² Discussions at Student Support Units

5.14. In 1995, 522 teachers completed PART training.¹¹³ This is about one sixth of total teaching staff.

5.15. The Department reported that evaluations conducted indicate overwhelming support for this program as a means of providing staff in schools with the confidence to deal with violence when it arises. Submissions to the inquiry also indicated strong support.

5.16. The only criticism from practising teachers of the PART program is the demand far outweighs available places. The course is conducted by specially trained trainers over two days usually a Friday and a Saturday. For the first six months of the program in 1995 funding was available to offline two trainers from teaching duties to conduct the training. This enabled at least two staff from most ACT government schools to complete the course. In addition several schools reported that they have been able to train all their staff in PART. There is still a strong demand, however funding restrictions will limit availability of the program to two schools and two centrally based courses per term in 1996.¹¹⁴

5.17. PART training is particularly important for staff in special school settings, who because of the nature of disability of some of the students are frequently required to deal with violent incidents. The Committee visited Malkara school and noted that only the senior staff had been able to participate in the training. The Committee believes that all contact staff in special settings including non teaching staff should receive PART training.

5.18. A researcher examining the issue of violence in schools cautioned against money being spent on training programs such as PART. It is her view that money would be better spent on training educators on how to set up an environment where people are less likely to be violent.¹¹⁵ The Committee sees value in both approaches.

5.19. The Committee acknowledges that PART training is not a behaviour management training program but rather a program to train staff in appropriate and legal emergency responses. It provides strategies and procedures to follow when the school's behaviour management program has not worked. Until such times as there is no violence at all in schools, teachers need to have appropriate skills to deal with extreme situations. To be effective PART training needs to be updated regularly. Given that this training program is seen by teachers to be equipping them with a very important set of tools for effectively managing violent behaviour, the Committee calls on the Department of Education and

¹¹³ Department of Education and Training, Correspondence dated 28 November 1995.

¹¹⁴ Transcript, p 27.

¹¹⁵ Transcript, p 115.

Training to give a commitment to making more resources available for PART training.

5.20. The Committee recommends that:

the Department of Education and Training ensure that:

- **all its teachers participate in courses relating to behaviour management and that necessary refresher training is provided;**
- **all contact staff in special settings have the opportunity to participate in Professional Assault Response Training or other similar programs.**

5.21. The Independent Schools' Staff Association advised that the level and extent of training and support directed at preventing violence in non government schools varies from school to school due to competing needs within schools for funding and time. A consequence of this situation is that, at times, policies are developed without adequate resources and ongoing training and support during their implementation.¹¹⁶

5.22. The Australian Education Union made a similar point when it stated:

*Schools need to be able to develop school based student management policies. This process requires the support of appropriate professional development programs and adequate pupil free time. The opportunity for ongoing reviews of school based programs needs to be supported by both time and resources. The opportunities for teachers across the school system to work together in the development of these programs and to share ideas is essential to the effectiveness of programs.*¹¹⁷

5.23. A number of individual schools also commented on the importance of adequate training and support for the development and implementation of programs on the prevention of violence. Some schools reported on the conflicts they face in balancing the professional development needs of staff and the disruption to classes which occurs when teachers are out of the school. Inadequate resourcing was cited as a major factor in severely restricting a school's ability to implement and gain maximum benefit from new initiatives.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Independent Schools' Staff Association, *Submission*.

¹¹⁷ Australian Education Union, *Submission*.

¹¹⁸ Richardson Primary School, *Submission*.

5.24. The issue of staff changes can also impact on support for particular programs. In informal discussions with school personnel the Committee was told that a change in principal or transfer of a particular teacher who was the driving force behind a specific program can lead to good and effective programs lapsing. Staff changes can on the other hand have a positive effect with an injection of new enthusiasm and ideas. The impact of staff changes on training and support for programs highlights the importance of ensuring the provision of adequate resources, both in terms of funding, personnel and time, to enable schools to seriously address behaviour management.

5.25. A critical consideration concerning support for programs is the level of support available in the playground. Since the majority of the violence occurring at schools takes place in the playground, training and support for playground programs is fundamental. One school suggested changes to the arrangements for teacher playground duty. Rather than having a fixed number of teachers on duty, for example two, there should be a minimum ratio of teachers to students, to ensure adequate supervision and support.¹¹⁹

5.26. The Committee visited Richardson Primary School and observed its Anti-bullying Program in the playground. This program is part of the school's Whole School Management Policy and receives support from the staff, parents and students. The underlying principle is that the playground is to be a safe and pleasant place for everyone. Inappropriate playground behaviour results in a withdrawal of playground privileges. A student whose behaviour is inappropriate is asked to sit in a designated 'time-out' area for a specified time. For more serious behaviour the student is sent from the playground to a designated room. Sometimes a student is not able to cope with the large playground environment after being sent from the playground and spends some time in the restricted playground until he/she demonstrates readiness for the large playground.

5.27. Playground Buddies play an important role in the playground. They are senior students trained in leadership, communication and mediation, who assist children and promote positive, cooperative behaviour in the playground. The buddies are also responsible for selecting and rewarding children who exhibit the 'behaviour of the week'.

5.28. Another important aspect of Richardson Primary School's Anti-Bullying Project is its playground socialisation program, which is put in place as needed. The program was developed in response to the difficulties displayed by a significant number of children at the school in behaving appropriately when in large open spaces. The specifically targeted children play with a larger group of good role models in the school's development playground. Rules for play

¹¹⁹ Hughes Primary School *Submission*.

are negotiated with the group and children receive positive feedback by the two supervising staff members.¹²⁰

5.29. Innovative playground programs such as the Richardson Primary program require a strong commitment from all involved.

5.30. In response to a need expressed by many ACT primary principals for assistance to provide safer playground environments, the Department of Education and Training has developed a resource package for primary schools entitled '*Safe Cooperative Playground Environments*' (*SCOPE*). *SCOPE* draws on national, international and local research and provides a broad range of strategies to reduce the incidence of violence in the playground.

5.31. This package covers a wide range of issues and provides references to a large range of resources which could assist teachers. It could be seen by some teachers as overwhelming and not as practical as some resources.

5.32. *The P.E.A.C.E. Pack - a Program for Reducing Bullying in our Schools*¹²¹ is another recently produced resource which has a very practical emphasis. It provides a comprehensive overview of information about the nature of school bullying and a wealth of resources to assist schools to develop policies, interventions and lesson plans.

¹²⁰ Richardson Primary School Submission.

¹²¹ Slee Phillip T *The P.E.A.C.E. Pack - A programme for reducing bullying in our schools*, Flinders University, South Australia, 1996.

Resourcing issues

5.33. A number of issues relating to resources in the government school system were raised.

5.34. The AEU maintained that the issue of class size impinges on the capacity of teachers to deal effectively with difficult and violent students. It asserted that the reduction of class size, particularly in the primary sector would ultimately address some of the difficulties experienced by teachers in dealing with violent behaviour.

5.35. The AEU and many schools also reported a need for more itinerant behaviour management specialists to support classroom teachers in schools. This is seen as an urgent need for government high schools.

5.36. Greater resourcing for remedial literacy and numeracy programs was seen as a means of alleviating some violence in schools. This is discussed in more detail in the section on early intervention.

5.37. The AEU claimed that there are insufficient resources to meet the needs of government schools in the area of school counselling. This was confirmed by several primary schools submitting to the inquiry. The AEU alleged that a shortage of school counsellors has resulted in some schools, particularly disadvantaged schools not receiving sufficient counselling resources.

5.38. The 1995-96 Select Committee on Estimates noted the shortage of school counsellors in government schools and was critical of the fact that no additional allocation of resources had been made available in the budget to overcome the counselling shortage.¹²²

5.39. The Department of Education and Training pointed out that while there is always a need for more counsellors, in relation to other states the ACT is better resourced. Unlike some other states the ACT government school system does not employ social workers. The Department's representative identified a specific need for more family counselling services.¹²³ This need was also identified by a number of schools and community organisations. The Committee heard repeatedly that the family counselling resources are inadequate.

¹²² Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, *Select Committee on Estimates 1995-96 and Budget Review Appropriation Bill 1995-96*, October 1995, p 36.

¹²³ Transcript, p 155.

5.40. The Committee views the provision of family counselling services as critical in assisting schools to address violent behaviour.

5.41. The Committee recommends that:

the Government, as a matter of urgency, examine ways of increasing funding for counselling services to schools to provide greater access to family counselling services.

5.42. Some schools have a higher proportion of students with behavioural problems. This can be related to disadvantage. Such schools often find it extremely difficult to access additional support. The Committee was told of one instance where a school was asked to enrol a student with severe behavioural problems and then had to fight for additional resources to support the student. The Committee finds this unsatisfactory.

5.43. The Committee noted that as a result of higher levels of payment of subject levies, voluntary contributions and well supported fundraising activities, some schools are much better resourced in terms of material items such as educational materials, library resources and outdoor equipment. The Committee visited one school, which because of the financial position of most of its families, does not collect voluntary contributions. Any school in this position must rely on additional funding available for disadvantaged schools. Such funding is extremely limited and reportedly not well advertised. A school which is unable to access additional funds is severely restricted in the range of activities and experiences which can be offered to students.

5.44. The Committee gained the impression from visits to schools and submissions from government schools that many schools feel unsupported by the Department of Education and Training when they are faced with dealing with students with violent behaviour. Any support offered is seen as too little too late.

5.45. Due to age, demographic factors and staff skills, government schools have different needs in relation to support. The Committee did not feel that these differing needs were adequately recognised or that the department was always responsive to the needs of some schools. Unlike many other states the ACT government does not fund schools on the basis of the number of identified disadvantaged students. The Committee would like to see a more equitable approach to resourcing government schools to ensure that funding and support reflect more adequately the differing needs of schools; that students' subject choices are not limited by the inability of their parents to pay school levies; and participation in defined excursions and extra curricular activities is not restricted to students whose parents have the capacity to pay.

5.46. These issues need to be considered in the context of possible changes to tied grant arrangements by the Commonwealth and may require some form of differential funding and staffing. Any changes to the current system of resourcing schools would need to be based on thorough research and consultation and include a comparative study of disadvantaged and non disadvantaged schools together with an analysis of the school population to determine where pockets of disadvantage exist.

5.47. They also need to be considered in the context of school based management. For example, the effect of the introduction of school based management in ACT government schools on the provision of counsellors is unclear. It has been proposed that counsellor resources could be devolved to schools.¹²⁴ Under current arrangements counsellor resources are centrally allocated. The Committee would be very concerned if an outcome of school based management was that schools needing higher levels of counsellor support were unable to fund that support.

5.48. The Committee notes that in the United Kingdom and New Zealand there are concerns about flexibility of choice decreasing with school based management. The Committee observed the importance of choice and flexibility in program delivery in fostering a non violent culture in schools.

5.49. The Committee recommends that:

- **the Government conduct a research study to identify needs of disadvantaged school communities and investigate more effective use of current resources to meet those needs;**
- **the Government establish a fund to assist students whose parents do not have the capacity to meet the costs of their children's participation in defined excursions, extra curricular activities or specific subjects;**
- **as a matter of urgency, the Government provide the Social Policy Committee with a thorough assessment of the equity implications of school based management including the ability of all schools to provide high standard support to students at risk;**
- **the Government give an assurance that the proposed untying of Commonwealth grants will not lead to a**

¹²⁴ ACT Department of Education and Training, *School Based Management in the Australian Capital Territory Discussion Paper*, November 1995.

decrease in real terms in funds for programs which support equity across the whole school system.

Support for teachers

5.50. The following matters relating to support for teachers were raised in a small number of submissions.

Legal issues

5.51. The Committee's attention was drawn to a paradox teachers can face in dealing with violent behaviour in schools. The Independent Schools Staff Association (ISSA) raised the issue of conflicting duties under the civil and criminal codes in relation to assault. The Australian Education Union also views this as an issue of deep concern. The possibility of a teacher needing to restrain a student to prevent injury to another or themselves raises the issue of conflict between duty of care and the possibility of criminal proceedings against the teacher on the grounds of assault. To fail to restrain may result in a breach of duty of care on the part of a teacher, while the otherwise reasonable action of a teacher restraining a student may leave the teacher open to criminal proceedings.

5.52. In commenting on this dilemma the Australian Education Union stated:

*I suppose in the profession we have to be conscious of it and be prepared to deal with it ...but I do not believe there is a finite answer in those situations and, I think, for teachers it is a worry ...but it is even a bigger worry if you do not intervene and some kid dies. Teachers are in a very difficult situation.*¹²⁵

5.53. ISSA reported a recent case where a Canberra teacher even though vindicated on an assault charge was required to sell his home to cover the costs of the criminal proceedings. In civil proceedings teachers' costs are usually covered by the school, but this is not the case with criminal proceedings where the teacher is usually left to defend the action.¹²⁶

5.54. ISSA has since taken out insurance to provide a form of legal protection to teachers. Even with the insurance coverage teachers will not be fully covered.

5.55. The Committee is extremely concerned that teachers can be placed in a position where, by exercising their duty of care, they can risk criminal prosecution and be faced with all the associated stresses and costs.

¹²⁵ Transcript, p 105.

¹²⁶ Independent Schools Staff Association, *Submission*.

Occupational health and safety issues

5.56. The Committee was told by a small number of schools and the unions that as a result of violent behaviour, occupational health and safety is becoming a concern. Infrequent, unpredictable violent outbursts by a student can result in injury to a teacher or another student as well as contributing to teacher stress.

5.57. One school, which cited three instances of teachers being physically attacked by kicking or hitting in a twelve month period, suggested that teacher salaries should include provision for an ever increasing 'dangerous' work environment.¹²⁷

5.58. The Committee was told that special schools are faced with specific occupational health and safety issues. Information from two special schools indicates that incidents of physical violence towards staff or a student occur almost daily.¹²⁸ Generally these incidents relate to the complexity of the students' disabilities.

5.59. Special schools have found Professional Assault Response Training effective in assisting staff to deal with violent behaviour and protecting staff and students from physical injury. The Committee has made a recommendation on this training earlier in the report.

5.60. It was clear to the Committee that violent behaviour whether physical or verbal can have serious occupational health and safety implications for schools. Teachers and students have a right to a safe environment and the Committee is aware that in general schools are continually working towards creating safer and healthier environments.

Kerrie Tucker MLA
Chair
14 May 1996

¹²⁷ Flynn Primary School Board, *Submission*.

¹²⁸ Transcript, p 183, Malkara School, *Submission*.

APPENDIX 1: SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

1. Confidential
2. Domestic Violence Crisis Service Inc.
3. Canberra Grammar School
4. Catholic Education Office
Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn
5. St. Edmunds College
6. Hughes Primary School Parents and Citizens Association
7. Flynn Primary School
8. The Resolution Centre
9. Weetangera Primary School Board
10. Australian Education Union - ACT Branch
11. Independent Schools' Staff Association ACT
12. The Woden School Board
13. Ms Audrey Guy
14. Canberra Church of England Girls' Grammar School
15. Stromlo High School
16. Giralang Primary School
17. Telopea Park School
18. Lyneham High School Board
19. Ms Sandy Hinson (ANU)
20. Melrose Primary School Board
21. Trinity Christian School
22. Marist College Canberra
23. Forrest School Board
24. Aranda Primary School Board
25. Faculty of Education, University of Canberra
26. Macquarie Primary School
27. Bonython Primary School Board
28. Woden Youth Centre

29. Department of Education and Training
30. Majura Primary School
31. Richardson Primary School
32. Malkara School
33. ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc.
34. Campbell Primary School
35. Melrose High School
36. AIDS Action Council
37. Australian Federal Police

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF WITNESSES

ACT Department of Education and Training and Children's Youth and Family Services Bureau

Mr Allan Hird
Ms Louise Blue
Ms Maureen McNamara
Ms Julia Zachara
Ms Jenny Reich
Ms Narelle Hargreaves
Mr Len Sheargold

Australian Education Union

Ms Fiona Macgregor

Catholic Education Office

Mr Mark Hogan

Independent Schools' Staff Association

Ms Colleen Hinder
Ms Terry Gibbons
Mr Ross Fotheringham

Individuals

Ms Sandy Hinson
Mr Neil Montgomery

Majura School Board

Mr Mark Eyles
Mr George Gamkrelidze
Ms Anne McNamara

Woden School Board

Ms Sue Boyce

Woden Youth Centre

Ms Kim Sattler

Belconnen Youth Centre

Mr Garry Newcombe

Jigsaw Theatre Company

Mr Darryl Shires
Ms Lynette Wallis

University of Canberra

Professor Clem Annice

Mr Gerald Olsen

Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Ms Rosalie McCormack

Australian Federal Police - ACT Region

Superintendent A Castle

Sergeant Peter Scotland

Sergeant Brian Dunn

Constable Michael Ward

Constable David Rugendyke

APPENDIX 3: PLACES VISITED BY THE COMMITTEE

ACT

Woden Youth Centre

Dairy Flat Student Support Unit

Yarralumla Student Support Unit

Urambi Student Support Unit

Stromlo High School

Calwell High School

Richardson Primary School

Adolescent Day Unit

Malkara School

South Australia

Beafield Education Centre

Holy Family Catholic School, Parafield Gardens

The Parks School, Angle Park

School of Education, Flinders University

Carclew Youth Arts Centre

APPENDIX 4: LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|------|--|
| ACT | Australian Capital Territory |
| AEU | Australian Education Union |
| ISSA | Independent Schools Staff Association |
| NSW | New South Wales |
| PAIR | Preventing Abuse in Relationships |
| PART | Professional Assault Response Training |