



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

---

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA (Deputy Chair),  
Mr Mark Parton MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the management and minimisation of bullying  
and violence in ACT schools

**Submission Number: 04**

**Date Authorised for Publication: 21 May 2019**

## **Submission to the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs inquiry into the management and minimisation of bullying and violence in ACT schools**

### **Recommendations for Change**

- 1. A simple and transparent way to track violence of individual children at a classroom and school level.** A simple and consistent matrix should be developed that is consistently used system wide and, in all schools, so a clear and timely snapshot of events can be recorded. It should identify categories of violence and frequency of violence. This simple data-collecting tool would be an imperative initial step to determine the next course of action.
- 2. A clear and defined system at a school and classroom level of how to identify a child where violence has become an issue.**

This sounds very basic, but many teachers and school leaders have varying tolerances and perception of violence. Should action be taken based on the number of events of violence or the severity of events? Once data is collected using the above-mentioned matrix, at what point does it warrant further action? When do we need to take further action? Everyone needs to be on the same page.
- 3. A clear, simple and transparent system of recording all forms of violence at a school and system level not just critical incidents, which the system has now.** This school and system recording procedure is imperative to get a clear picture of violence in classrooms and schools. It also provides crucial information as children are passed from teacher to teacher and grade to grade. How do you assess there is a problem or a change of frequency of violence in an individual child if there is no effective base line data?
- 4. A clear flow chart showing how to respond to acts of violence.** This needs to demonstrate different courses of action and show when situations need to be accelerated further and how. This document needs to be used by teachers and school leaders so there is a clear chain of process to respond to violence. This needs to be extremely transparent and teachers need to be trained in how to use it. There is a need to have two possible flow charts. One for bullying and violence from parents and another from children.
- 5. Teachers need to be informed of their legal duty of care for their students regarding violent behaviour and what they need to demonstrate so they do not unwittingly breach this duty of care.** If legally we are meant to keep meticulous records of our responses to violence and proof of how we mitigate the risks to other children, then why are we not informed of this and furthermore why are there no systems policies and procedures to support this practice?
- 6. Teachers and school leaders need to be informed of their rights for a safe workplace under The Work Health and Safety laws in the A.C.T.** We have some of the strongest workplace laws in the country, but many parties involved in the education system seem uninformed of their rights and responsibilities, this is from teachers right through to a system level. It is as though in practice, schools and classrooms lay outside these laws.

7. **Training on how to respond to children demonstrating violence should be mandatory in all schools and regularly updated.** There can be 'knee jerk' training after a violent incident in which the system office will send out 'specialists' for a single staff meeting but this is piecemeal at best. A more thorough and comprehensive training in how to respond and manage violence in schools is required.
8. **A clarification of the Disability Act regarding violence and the impact of safety for other children.** At what point are the acts of ongoing violence of a child deemed causing 'undue hardship' (language of the Disability Act) on a school community. Clear guidance and clarification are needed when the Disability Act, The Education Act and the Work Health and Safety Act all come into play. How does a school and a system balance out the requirements of all? How do they demonstrate this balance for all stake holders in a transparent way?
9. **A) A strong and enforceable code of conduct that parents are required to sign and abide by.**

As any other work place, bullying and violence in any form should not be tolerated in any way. As the recent media attests, teachers are becoming targets of parent violence, bullying and harassment. Primary teachers are by far mostly female. It is appalling to see the gender-based violence perpetuated in our schools. Would we allow this violence towards other professionals in other workplaces go unchecked? I also question the legal empowerment of teachers? Are we informed that we can get AVO's if harassment becomes extreme? Is my employer informing me and protecting me as a teacher?

10. **B) A triage system of emails through the school front office.**

Email conduct from parents also needs to be strongly addressed in the code of conduct. A very common form of bullying towards teachers comes from the liberal access parents have to teachers directly through email. I have witnessed the extreme harassment and bullying of teachers through these emails. You cannot unread the violent or derogatory words sent to you once you have read them.

In the N.S.W public education system in primary schools, all emails to teachers go through the front office. If any are violent, bullying or extreme emails are sent, they are immediately forwarded through to the legal department to address. It usually takes just a return warning from the legal department to curb inappropriate behaviour. Very quickly parents learn only to send respectful emails and only about vital matters. I have seen a colleague of mine be inundated with an extraordinary amount of emails from one parent on a daily basis. This is a real form of harassment and bullying.

11. **A mandatory debriefing procedure and enforced policy for school leaders**

When staff or children witness a critical incident of violence, they need a channel to professionally debrief the incident soon after it occurs. The leaders of the school could follow a script of questions and allow people time to talk through the events. At present we are told employee counselling is available, which may take weeks to get into. Also, it is important to debrief with people who understand the complexities of a situation in a timely manner.