Submission Cover Sheet

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

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My daughter was in the playground with her friends when a girl and a group of about 20 students came over to her. The girl started punching her in the face and head while everyone looked on and some people recorded it. My daughter was pushed up against the fence and was holding onto the fence to keep herself upright. The girl stopped when another student said she had had enough. My daughter sustained a black eye and bruising on her head. She has a permanent lump under the skin near her eye from the damage. We took out a PPO however these are really ineffective at school as the teachers can not enforce them when the people involved attend the same school.

After the assault we had significant issues with my daughters mental health and behaviour. My daughter became very aggressive and suffered from anxiety. She was not engaged in school and spent most days trying to avoid people who would abuse her. A few weeks after the incident a girl had her hands around my daughters neck, she was asked to stop and didn’t so my daughter bit her on the arm. This was unusual behaviour for her as she had not bitten anyone since being a toddler. My daughter began to act out at school and at home, she would have anger outbursts and swear etc. It was as if she didn’t know how to communicate what she was feeling. She was scared of attending school not just because of the girl but because of the girls friends. She would have panic attacks about attending school. Every few months the video will resurface again and we go through all the emotions again. We feel like it is something that will never go away. My son who also attends the same school in a different year has received harassment from the same group of people. Its disgusting. One kid made my son kiss his foot and then tried to kick him in the face!! These people have knives they go to school with weapons and no one is safe!

The assault affected me significantly. I suffer from ptsd from work where there is a lot of assault, riots and abuse. Seeing my daughter attacked the way she was, was a trigger for me in my recovery. Even now the thought of what happened and seeing the video when it was posted gives me increased anxiety. We raised our concerns regarding the ongoing harassment and bullying to the school and little could be done. It took almost a year for the situation to be resolved in the courts and when it was, we weren’t advised until earlier this year. The entire process has been traumatic for myself and my other child who attends that school.

At the recommendation of the school, we had to remove my daughter from school towards the end of term 4 last year due to the same girl making threats to assault my daughter again. She was not safe at school. The school were supportive of removing her as they could not see any other way to keep her safe. We had very limited options regarding moving her schools because, the bullying would continue. Social media means all these kids are connected. And it is impossible to get a child into a school out of area. My daughter is an average student, with learning difficulties and we have nothing to offer a school in another suburb and as a result she would not be accepted in another school. **Because of this we made the decision to send my daughter interstate to live with a family member as we did not feel we could safely send her to a school here in the ACT.** Since moving I might
add, the bullying, harassment and abuse has been near non-existent. There was a settling in period but my daughter has never been happier. She goes to school, her engagement and work has improved and she is enjoying life again. It’s a shame we can’t offer her this here in Canberra.

I can’t talk for other schools but the school my daughter attend has significant violence issues. There are a group of about 20 year 9 students who seem to terrorise the school regardless of what year level you are in. These students are extremely dangerous. I have been threatened by these students and I’ve also received threats that students were going to come to my house and smash every window and smash my car. I’ve called the police and they didn’t attend as they were busy. I know of instances at my daughters’ school where the school has been in lock down due to a student being found to have knives in his backpack!

The teachers are doing the best they can with the tools they have (ie nothing). There seems to be nothing they are able to do to stop this behaviour. They are powerless to stop these kids because they have no power/tools and the students know this. Teachers at this particular school seem to be social workers more than teachers. Why is it these kids cannot be expelled? What do they have to do before they are removed from the school and not the kids that are being bullied or abused? These kids who don’t want to learn and who continually terrorise others should be removed from school! If they don’t want an education and can’t follow the rules then that’s their problem. It’s not fair on everyone else that this behaviour is tolerated. My daughter’s attacker was suspended for 2 days, that’s all 2 days. She got to go back to school like nothing happened and my daughter has to live with the incident day in and day out knowing she will never be safe at school here in Canberra.

The students seem to think that you can not get expelled from a public school. This (if true) is outrageous. There are children at this school that are a danger to themselves and others. Why have we had to move our daughter interstate to get a safe education? There is something fundamentally wrong with the education system if this happens.

We have previously written to the Directorate to advise them of the ongoing harassment our daughter was receiving and they ignored our email, the abuse my daughter received was not just the assault at the start of last year it was all year! She would be verbally abused, told to kill herself, kicked in the back, chairs kicked out from under her, a rubbish bin tipped on her head!!!!!!! Basically, her life was hell, it was relentless. The teachers were not able to stop any of it nor were they able to minimise the abuse from happening. We wrote to the directorate and requested compensation for medical expenses and were advised that the school nor the teachers were at fault so therefore they are not liable.

I do believe they should be liable for providing a safe and harmonious school environment for all children! Parents shouldn’t have to send their children away to get an education!