

School Safety: The Way Forward

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Forum *Taumata Whanonga:
From Evidence to Action*

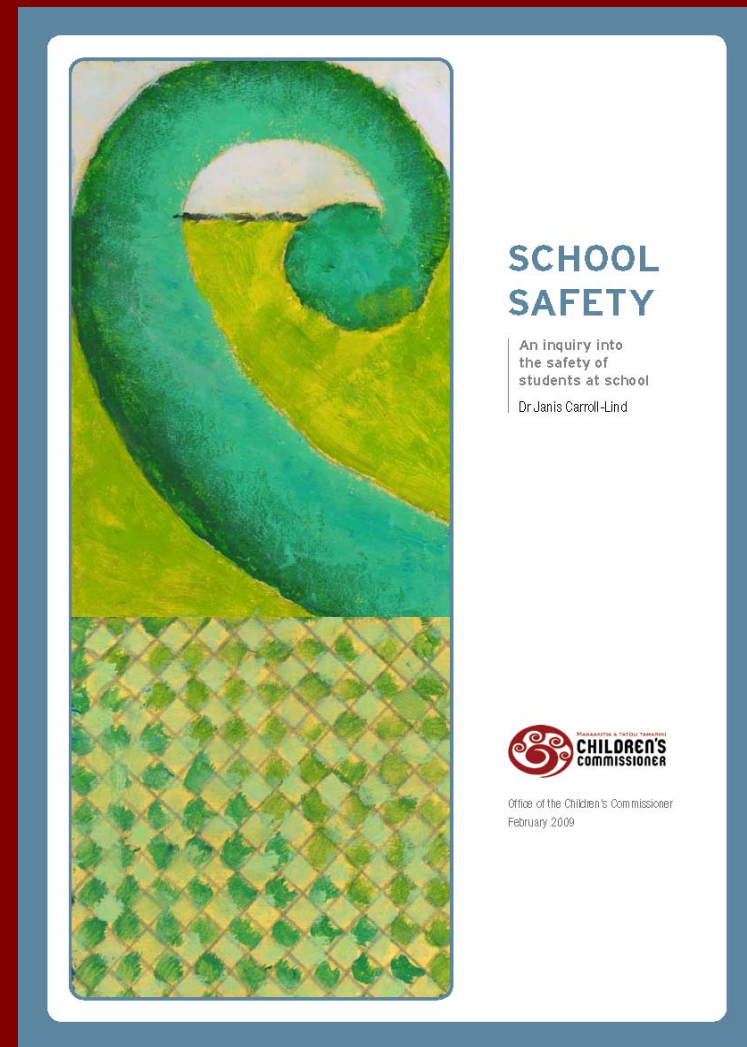
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School Safety: An Inquiry into the Safety of Students at School

Available at www.occ.org.nz



Background to the Inquiry

- ◆ Ongoing telephone and written concerns to our two enquiry lines about bullying and violence in schools, including boarding hostels
- ◆ Other children's advice lines (*What's Up*)
- ◆ Number of high profile cases reported in media
- ◆ Consultation with children and young people consistently identified bullying as a key concern
- ◆ Review of the literature

References

Barnardos / What's Up (2009)



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Office of the Children's Commissioner

In the core functions of advocacy, monitoring or investigation matters, the Children's Commissioner has a statutory responsibility to be an independent advocate for children and young people and to take cognisance of the diversity of children in New Zealand.



References

Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989

Children's Commissioner Act 2003

Crown Entities Act 2004



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Consultation with Children

The Children's Commissioner must also ensure that children and young people are able to speak out on issues that concern them.



Pictured: Young People's Reference Group (2006 - 2008)



Purpose

- ◆ To offer effective ways forward to create safer schools
- ◆ To highlight exemplary practices in schools that have worked to address issues of violence and bullying
- ◆ To not gather prevalence and incidence rates



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Inquiry Included:

1. A review of the literature
2. Consultation with children and young people
3. Document analysis of bullying complaints
4. Identification of success case study criteria and schools who met these criteria
5. Visits to case study schools
6. Analysis and integration of data collected to identify elements of best practice

References

Aitken, Bruce Ferguson, McGrath, Piggot-Irvine, & Ritchie (2008)

Brinkerhoff (2003)

Brinkerhoff (2005)



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Findings

- ◆ Many schools operate effectively and have clear policies and procedures (e.g., playground supervision, reporting, recording, self-reviews) to ensure the issue of bullying is addressed
- ◆ The success case study schools had all worked over time to build a strong culture and ethos of school community.

Findings

- ◆ These schools all incorporated a whole school approach, underpinned by anti-bullying policies, procedures and preventive programmes integrated into the school curriculum.
- ◆ Schools used different approaches and different strategies to guide their positive school cultures but the benefits were the same

What We Learned: Common Themes

- ◆ In some instances there were gaps between policy and students' realities
- ◆ For whatever reason, some schools chose not to acknowledge or report specific incidents of bullying or violence
- ◆ Key concern of parents was the slow response of schools to address bullying issues involving their children.

What We Learned: Common Themes

- ◆ Alongside perceived inaction or non-response was a failure to inform students and their parents of any actions that had been taken
- ◆ Similarly, the main reason children chose not to disclose incidents of bullying was because of students' perceptions that the bullying would not be addressed.

Teachers

- ◆ Other than the students themselves, teachers are a school's most valuable resource for combating bullying and victimisation
- ◆ Teachers lie just outside the peer ecology and help shape intentionally, and unintentionally, the social interactions of their students
- ◆ Teachers cannot respond if they do not know about it and most incidents happen “beneath the radar” of teachers.

Peers:

Part of Problem and Part of Solution

- ◆ View bullying as a group phenomenon that recognises the diversity of experiences along the bully/victim continuum, including students as bystanders and reinforcers and the contribution of peers in relational aggression
- ◆ Establish a culture of safe telling (e.g., confidential reporting system, safety web)
- ◆ Implement procedures around mobile phone use at school.



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Definitional Issues

- ◆ Inquiry revealed inconsistencies in the ways that bullying, violence and abuse were defined
- ◆ That schools *defined* these terms differently and in some cases *responded* differently to the various incidents has identified inconsistencies and gaps in reporting procedures, e.g., (1) informing parents of specific incidents and actions taken; and (2) notifying Police in cases of serious assault.

Definitions



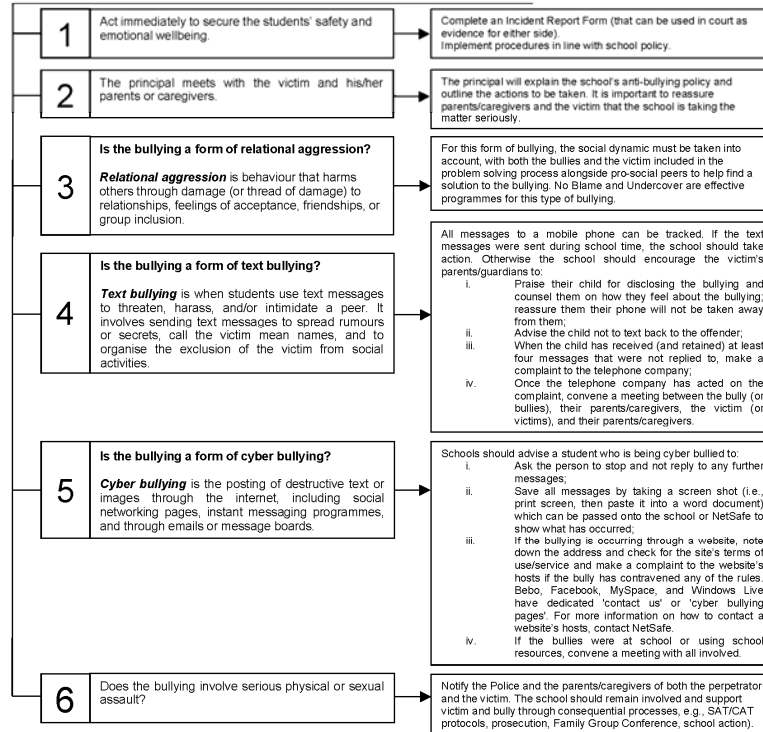
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RESPONSE TO BULLYING

Bullying is deliberately harmful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, by a person or group, who target a less powerful person as the victim. In other words, bullying occurs when one child consistently targets another for negative treatment and the victim feels powerless to stop the interaction. The hurtful actions can be: (1) physical, such as hitting and punching; (2) verbal assaults, for example, teasing, taunting, threatening and name-calling, or (3) indirect, such as psychological exclusion from friendship groups or spreading rumours.

In the first instance schools need to determine the type of incident according to the definitions of bullying, and then refer to its bullying policies and procedures to determine the course of action. Regular self-reviews of the school climate, programmes and strategies to prevent bullying are also necessary.

What process is most effective for schools when bullying occurs?



Competing Obligations?

- ◆ Schools are required to manage the procedural issues involving paramountcy (students' welfare and best interests must be the first consideration) and natural justice (obligation to act fairly and reasonably in the circumstances)
- ◆ At times this means managing consequences and impact of decisions made when both the victim and perpetrator continue to attend same school.

What Works?

- ◆ Shared ownership of a whole school approach
- ◆ Underpinned by clearly stated policies and procedures
- ◆ Incorporating an agreed on definition of bullying and violence, with clear guidelines for reporting and recording incidents
- ◆ Established systems for confidential disclosures within a culture of safe telling
- ◆ Planned prevention and intervention programmes
- ◆ Regular self-review of school environment and anti-bullying initiatives.

Recommendations:

- ◆ Whole School Approach
- ◆ Policy and Procedures
- ◆ Self-Review and Professional Development
- ◆ Collaborative Responses

Whole School Approaches and Programmes

- ◆ The only programmes that are effective are those that attempt to alter the school environment rather than focusing on bullies and victims alone
- ◆ Helping young people fully develop their personal and social skills is considered by some schools to be as important as participation in violence prevention programmes.



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Effective Programmes

- ◆ No matter which programme, effective policies and procedures must be in place
- ◆ Creating safer schools is not dependent on money
- ◆ Restorative practices are more successful than punitive practices and contribute to a positive school culture

References



Responsive Schools

- ◆ Summary report of key messages from inquiry
- ◆ Showcases and details the whole school approaches and programmes underpinning the culture and ethos of the success case study schools
- ◆ Book will be sent to all schools

