



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

***Student Consultation Report:
Students' views about bullying***

16 September 2010

**An initiative of the Queensland
Schools Alliance Against Violence**

Acknowledgements

The Commission would like to thank the students who participated in this consultation, and acknowledge their parents /carers for giving consent. The students willingly shared their ideas and opinions with an honesty that was admirable. We are mindful that for some students who participated bullying is an emotive topic, and we are very grateful they felt comfortable enough to share their personal stories and perspectives. It is hoped that by participating, students learned from each other.

The Commission would also like to thank the participating schools. Without their agreement this consultation would not have been possible. Despite very short notice, the five schools accommodated the consultation activity in the busy last weeks of second term. A special thanks goes to the staff involved in making the necessary arrangements.

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction.....	7
Background	7
Purpose of consultation.....	7
Consultation Design.....	8
Consultation method	8
Participating schools	8
Participating students.....	8
Focus group questions.....	9
Ethical considerations	9
Procedure.....	10
Limitations	10
Evaluation.....	10
Findings	11
1. Establishing a clear definition of bullying.....	11
What the toolkit says about the nature of bullying and defining it	11
What students said about:	
what is bullying	11
forms of bullying.....	13
why kids are bullied	15
what kids who bully are like	16
why some kids watch or join in.....	17
what it feels like to be bullied.....	18
How kids rated bullying as a problem.....	18
2. Developing and implementing a school's anti-bullying policy	21
What the toolkit says.....	21
What students said about:	
who should be involved in developing the policy.....	21
why students want to be involved.....	23
ways of involving students in policy development	25
communicating the anti-bullying policy	26
reinforcing the policy	28
the values and behaviours a policy should encourage	29
3. Procedural Steps	30
What the toolkit says	30
What students said about:	
what actions kids can take when bullying occurs	30
telling someone	32
why kids don't report bullying	33
what would make them comfortable about reporting	35
involving parents.....	38
consequences for the bully	40
helping those involved	42
the best thing their school has done to combat bullying	44
4. Consulting with Students	48
What the toolkit says	48
What students said	48
Focus group evaluation findings.....	48
Discussion and Recommendations.....	50
Appendices	53
Appendix 1 – Focus Group Questions	54
Appendix 2 – Focus Group Discussion Guide	56
Appendix 3 – Discussion Group Consent Form.....	58
Appendix 4 – Information sheet for parents	59
Appendix 5 – Focus Group Evaluation Form	60
Appendix 6 – Overview of recent bullying and violence research	61

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a student consultation process conducted by the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian* on behalf of the *Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence (QSAAV)*. Students in Year 6 and Year 9 from five Queensland schools were invited to participate in eight focus groups about bullying in schools. In all the Commission heard from sixty-three students.

The primary purpose of the consultation was to (i) test specific elements of the best practice toolkit developed by QSAAV to assist schools to take action against bullying, and (ii) determine if, and how, students want to be involved in developing and implementing anti-bullying policy. A secondary purpose was to model and document a student consultation process that schools could adopt.

Students as stakeholders

The consistent and unequivocal message from both Year 6 and Year 9 students was: *'we should be included'*, *'we want to be included'* in developing, implementing and monitoring our school's anti-bullying policy and responses. Students suggested they are well placed to know what is going on, what types of bullying are common in their school and if strategies to address it are working. They reasoned that without their involvement, the school's policy will not be as effective.

The strength of their views and the rationale behind them, reveal that the students do not see themselves as passive recipients of school policy and practices. Rather they see themselves as major stakeholders whose input into every stage of policy development and implementation will add value to the decision-making process, ensure greater student ownership of the problem and solutions and produce better outcomes.

The majority of students did not suggest a year level or age which should preclude participation, but inferred all students should have the right to participate if they choose. The only do-able way of giving students this opportunity is by engaging with them at the local level using a range of methods that allow them to give their input honestly.

The merit of the toolkit

The three elements of QSAAV's *Working Together* toolkit which the focus groups 'tested' related to establishing a whole-of-school definition of bullying, the collaborative development of an anti-bullying policy and processes for reporting and responding. The consultation findings indicate that students consider all of these matters to be important. However from the students' perspective, the crux of the matter is putting an end to the bullying without making their situation worse.

The students also expressed views that are relevant to the remainder of the toolkit. In particular, their views support the call for respectful and inclusive school cultures; programs that develop students' emotional resilience; school staff with skills to respond appropriately to students' bullying concerns, and parental awareness of the schools' management approach to bullying.

Overall, the collective views of the students correlate with the research and best-practice evidence presented in the toolkit. Their views bear out the usefulness of the toolkit and the framework it provides for a whole-of-school approach to dealing with student-on-student bullying. Indeed the students' comments strongly suggest that they want to see a clear and consistent whole-of-school approach rather than ad hoc responses to bullying at school.

Student voices add value

By giving voice to the insights of students, the consultation findings bring a reality and richness to the toolkit's messages which adds value for *Working Together* audiences. More importantly perhaps, the findings identify some consistent themes and common issues among the participating students which may be relevant to the wider student population. In this way, the findings may also give direction to schools on where to focus their efforts.

For example, students in this consultation placed an emphasis on telling someone trustworthy, having someone who will listen compassionately, being able to report confidentially and having their report dealt with immediately and discretely without incurring retribution or further embarrassment. They want to see people who bully held to account. Yet they also recognise that all parties need to be offered support to manage their interactions with others and to build skills to deal more effectively with conflict, whether it be bullying or other behaviours which can be just as hurtful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the consultation findings, the Commission recommends that:

1. Queensland schools give all students the opportunity to be involved when developing, implementing and monitoring school-based anti-bullying policy and strategies at the local level.
2. The student consultation report be made available to Queensland schools to complement the *Working Together* products and to demonstrate the insights and ideas to be gained by involving students.
3. The *Working Together* section on the professional development of teachers include references to the insights of students. In addition, the list of development topics should include:
 - the recognition and management of latent and emerging behaviours which do not fully manifest as bullying, and
 - exploration of the tensions between a student's sensitivity about disclosure, their desire for confidentiality and the need to take action to address the problem.
4. The insights of students be included in products developed by the sectors to inform parents about bullying and how to respond to bullying concerns which arise at school.
5. Queensland schools create opportunities for students to safely recognise, explore and practice responses to bullying. Opportunities should include the use of drama to demonstrate relevant scenarios and solutions accompanied by discussion with teachers and peers.

6. Schools collect local data and information from students to assist in the development of tailored school-based approaches to bullying and enable the school to internally evaluate the effectiveness of those approaches over time.

Introduction

Background to consultation

In February 2010, the Premier announced the establishment of the cross-sector *Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence* (QSAAV). QSAAV's role is to provide the Queensland Government with independent advice on effective strategies to address bullying and violence in all Queensland state and non-state schools, and to oversee the implementation of recommendations made by Dr Rigby in his report "*Enhancing Responses to Bullying in Queensland Schools*".

An important consideration for QSAAV has been how to give students a voice in this process. The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (the Commission) is a member of QSAAV and has led QSAAV's student consultation. QSAAV has focused its consultation on students' views about anti-bullying policy development and implementation in schools, rather than on bullying and violence more broadly. This decision takes account of what is already known from research and consultation in this area. (An overview of recent research and engagement activity involving students can be found in the Appendices.)

Purpose of consultation

The primary aim of the consultation was to 'test' three of the ten elements of effective school based action against bullying identified in QSAAV's *Working Together Toolkit*. The toolkit has been developed to provide schools with an effective framework from which to address bullying and is based on national and international research and best practice.

The consultation focused on the following three elements of the toolkit:

- establishing a clear whole of school definition of bullying
- establishing a clear anti-bullying policy and
- developing procedural steps to respond appropriately to bullying incidents.

Emphasis was also placed on gathering students' views about student consultation and if, and how, they would like to be consulted when schools develop and implement policy. Ultimately QSAAV's aim is for every school to consult with its own student body about how bullying is handled at the local level.

A secondary aim was for the Commission to trial one consultation method which schools could apply when making whole-of-school decisions, not only about bullying, but other matters significant to students. To assist schools, the Commission will provide QSAAV with Consultation Guidelines for inclusion in the *Working Together's* resource section. The Guidelines will describe a range of consultation methods – with an emphasis on those suggested by students during this consultation.

Consultation Design

Consultation method

The method used was focus group discussion. The Commission conducted a total of eight focus groups with Year 6 and Year 9 students across five schools from the three education sectors (Government, Catholic and independent). The eight groups were held between 10 June and 23 June 2010.

Participating schools

The five schools were chosen from a list provided by the QSAAV Secretariat. The aim was to include at least one school from each education sector and schools of different demographics. At QSAAV's request, the Commission included two North Queensland schools. To protect student confidentiality, this report does not name the schools.

A total of sixty-three students participated. The distribution by Year level and school was as follows:

<i>School</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>No of students</i>	<i>Groups</i>
A	Regional independent, all girls school	9	8 - all girls	1
B	Regional state high school	9	19 - 7 boys/12 girls	2
C	Metropolitan Catholic primary school	6	13 - 4 boys/9 girls	2
D	Rural state primary school	6	8 - 4 boys/4 girls	1
E	Metropolitan Catholic co-educational school	9	15 - 7 boys/8 girls	2

Participating Students

Consultation was limited to Year 6 and Year 9 students. The students were aged between 10 and 14 years old.

Seven of the eight groups were single gender groups. One Year 6 group was mixed. Of the sixty-three students who participated:

- 21 students were from Year 6 – 8 boys and 13 girls
- 42 students were from Year 9 – 14 boys and 28 girls
- 41 of the students were girls and 22 were boys

Schools selected the students. The Commission's parameters were that students must want to participate, be willing to have a say, have parental consent and not currently exhibit bullying behaviour¹.

Beyond that, the approaches taken by schools differed. For example, one school said the selected students represented the school's cultural diversity, while another school group represented a wide 'behavioural' mix.

¹ The exclusion of students who currently bully others was intended as a risk minimisation measure.

By their own admission during group discussion, some students identified as having a past history of bullying behaviour and some students said they had been bullied.

Though the Commission suggested eight students per group, the group size was ultimately decided by the number of students with signed parental consent who wanted to participate on the day. On the day, two boys at different schools chose not to take part.

In those schools where separate gender groups were held, more girls than boys chose to participate. The inclusion of an all girls' school also contributed to an over-representation of girls in the sample.

Schools were asked to do some preparatory work with students prior to the focus groups. The aim was to give students an opportunity to reflect on the topic of bullying so they could articulate a more considered personal view during the group discussion.

Focus group questions

The focus questions were divided into three sections to align with the three elements of the *Working Together Toolkit* being tested. The questions sought to obtain students' views about:

- The nature of bullying – what it is and what form it can take
- Procedural steps – what actions should be taken when bullying occurs (ie. reporting process and intervention strategies) and
- Developing a school anti-bullying policy – who should be involved, the best ways of involving students and how the policy can be communicated.

The Focus Questions can be found in the Appendices.

One significant change was made to the focus questions during the consultation process and this was after the first group. The first group was asked to anonymously rate how big a problem they thought bullying was on a scale of 1 to 10. Subsequent groups were also asked to anonymously rate how big a problem bullying was for them personally and to give a reason for both of their ratings.

Ethical considerations

Participation required the written consent of the student and their parent/guardian. Parents and students were also asked to consent to an audio recording of the group discussion, and for the student's de-identified comments to be used in the Commission's report.

An Information Sheet accompanying the Consent Form advised students and parents of the purpose of the consultation, how the focus group would be conducted and what to expect in relation to privacy and confidentiality. (The Consent Form and Information Sheet can be found in the Appendices.)

Schools were invited to have a staff member sit in as an observer, and/or to have staff available afterwards in case a student wanted to talk about something that came up during the discussion.

To minimise disclosure of personal information, students were asked, before the group commenced, to try to avoid talking about themselves or using real names when telling a story to explain their ideas.

They were also asked to follow a 'no gossip rule' after the group concluded, meaning they could talk with teachers, parents or classmates about the questions and their own answers, but not about other people.

Students were advised at the outset to speak up if they felt uncomfortable at any time or wanted to say something without it being recorded. Importantly, students were informed that their personal information would be kept confidential, except if something was said that led the facilitators to believe that an individual was at significant risk of harm. Students were directed to talk to the school representative after the group if they wanted to follow up on any personal issues.

Procedure

The focus groups were held on school premises. Most of the groups ran for 90 minutes and included a refreshment break. Two Commission officers facilitated the group discussion and a third officer took notes. Three of the five schools chose to have a staff member sit at a distance from the group in the role of observer.

Discussion was guided by a series of focus questions put to students by the facilitators. Each student was encouraged to give an opinion and students were invited to talk to each other rather than directly to the facilitators. The facilitators did not give their own opinions. (The Discussion Guide can be found in the Appendices.)

The focus questions were divided into three sections. Seven of the eight groups broke out into two smaller groups to discuss the set of questions which addressed procedural steps in response to bullying incidents. The boys group at school E did not break out as there were only four students in the group.

Limitations

The consultation was limited to eight focus groups due to timeframes imposed by QSAAV's own reporting deadlines. While the small sample size means the student views presented in this report cannot be considered representative of students in general, the findings highlight the value and benefits to be had if schools across the State were to consult with students more broadly. In 2009, there were more than 700,000 students enrolled in a total of 1700 primary and secondary schools in Queensland².

Evaluation

At the close of each focus group, students were invited to complete an Evaluation Form. The results are discussed on page 48 of this report. (The Evaluation Form can be found in the Appendices.)

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010). Schools, Australia, 2009, Cat No. 4221.0 Canberra, Australia

Findings

1. Establishing a clear whole-of-school definition of bullying

What the Toolkit says:

The *Working Together Toolkit* overviews the nature of bullying and suggests that a key step in taking effective action against bullying is for schools to establish a clear whole-of-school definition.

The Working Together Toolkit –

- recommends any definition adopted should identify that bullying is repeated behavior, involves a power imbalance and takes many forms.
- identifies five kinds of bullying: physical, verbal, covert, psychological and cyber.
- suggests schools may choose to incorporate within their definition some specific types of bullying relevant to their school.
- notes students can be bullied for variety of reasons such as race, culture, appearance, sexual orientation, home circumstances, learning needs or disabilities, gender.
- notes the characteristics of students who bully. For example, they are often popular, have good leadership skills, are not malicious in their intent, and are thoughtless in their actions.
- identifies behaviours that do not constitute bullying but can be upsetting and need to be addressed such as mutual arguments, single acts of social rejection, one-off acts of meanness or spite, isolated acts of aggression.
- identifies the different roles students can play in bullying behavior such as ring leader, associates, reinforcers, bystanders and defenders.

What students said about:

(i) what is bullying

The ability to define bullying varied across the eight groups. Some groups, including the Year 6s, were better able to articulate the elements that distinguish bullying from other behaviours. However, across the groups, students collectively referred to elements that concur with accepted definitions of bullying.

All groups described bullying in terms of **hurtful behaviour** and referred to **different forms**. Typically, bullying was described as:

- *anything that makes anybody feel uncomfortable or hurts them – anything physical or mentally.* (Year 9 boy, school C)

Behaviours which students cited as causing hurt to someone else included (but was not limited to):

- *making rude remarks, name calling, punching, gossiping, spreading rumours and fake information, dirty looks, threats or excluding someone.*

Other descriptors used for bullying included:

- *being mean and unfair to someone, belittling someone, feeling personally attacked, made to feel unsafe and insecure, being put down, being angry and taking it out on someone else.*

The **different forms** of bullying which students identified are discussed on page 13.

The majority view of students in all groups was that bullying is **repeated behaviour**: For example:

- *You can have a big argument and ...a biff-up with your best mate and afterwards you can be mates again, its over. But when its continuous, when it goes on and on that's when it turns to bullying and being malicious. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *if you're in a game and no one is letting you in and you try it every day but it never happens. (Year 6 boy, school E)*

However a few Year 9 students from different schools considered some one-off acts, such as bashing someone up or spreading a rumour, as bullying. One Year 9 girl had a particularly strong view:

- *If you're just going to do it one day or heaps of days, it's still bullying. There's no difference. (Year 9 girl, school C)*

Half of the groups made direct reference to '**power**' when trying to explain what bullying is. A Year 6 boy from School E for example, said bullying was:

- *when one person or a group has more power over another person or a group and they call them names or physically hurt them. Having more power, he said, meant 'like physically stronger or more popular'. (Year 6 boy, school E)*

A power imbalance was implied in many of the reasons all the groups gave when asked why some kids are bullied and what kids who bully are like. (See pages 15-16). On the other hand, some of the bullying situations discussed, particularly by Year 9 girls, sounded more like disagreements between people of equal power.

Not surprisingly, a number of students associated bullying with **group behaviour**. One Year 9 girl for example spoke about the '*hierarchy in groups.*' Another said:

- *bullying can be based on a leader – like everyone does what they do, where they sit .. and then if that person decides to pick on someone else, everyone else in the group does too. (Year 9 girl, school A)*

Several students in one group expressed strong views that bullying is **deliberate**. Yet a comment made in most groups was that sometimes a person '*may not know that what they are doing is bullying*'. The suggestion was that 'the bully' may be unaware of the hurt they are causing as it can depend on how the other person perceives their actions or words. As a Year 9 boy explained:

- *It's not really up to you when you cross the line between joking and bullying. It's up to the person who is subject to that. (Year 9 boy, school C)*

Bullying is often passed off as a joking around. Students were asked to explain the difference. A student who had been bullied said:

- *You know its joking around when they say sorry, help you up, make sure you're okay. When it's bullying they won't do that. They'll laugh and walk away or just keep hitting you. (Year 9 boy, school C)*

Groups were not questioned further about **what isn't bullying**. However, both Year 6 groups at school E spoke about the value of knowing how to differentiate between bullying and other hurtful behaviours. They described an anti-bullying program their school had recently introduced which:

- *.. kind of tells you what isn't bullying. So you ignore what isn't bullying. Like, there is one thing on bullying, and then there are other things that may seem like bullying, but actually aren't because they don't continue. (Year 6 girl, school E)*

Notably, one Year 6 student commented on the focus group evaluation form that: *"We should have discussed what bullying isn't more"*.

(ii) forms of bullying

When asked what forms of bullying there were, all groups referred to **physical, verbal** and **cyber**. Seven of the eight groups also referred to **spreading rumours**. Other 'forms' were variously described as: *social, mental, psychological, emotional, harassment, gossiping, discrimination* and *exclusion*.

There were different views about what form, if any, was **worst**. A few students indicated that they were *"all bad in their own way," "all types should be against the rules"* and it depended on the individual:

- *like someone might get more hurt by emotional and some by physical. (Yr 9 girl, school B).*

However most expressed a view about one form of bullying being worse than others. Year 6 students generally said *'physical bullying'* or *'rumours'* while Year 9s most commonly said either physical, rumours or cyber bullying. The reasons students gave for why they thought a particular form was worse included:

- *I reckon nothing worse than physical – because physical is ...getting right in there, just bashing them up. (Year 9 boy school B)*
- *for me its face to face because it just intimidates you --- especially when you have someone towering over you --- and they've got cronies that will back them up and you're there with a couple of friends and your couple of friends don't want to get involved so they walk off and then you're left by yourself. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *Rumours – because they can like make the bystanders as bad as the bullies -- cause the person they can get really sad sometimes and it hurts them bad -- when you spread rumours people believe them and they don't want to be your friend because they think it's true. [It can] Ruin your reputation. (Year 6 girl, school D)*

- *Cyber definitely – because can't escape, it's 24/7 – they keep sending and sending and sending. The only way you'll escape it is not to go on. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *With cyber you can tell someone and they'll do something about it. With physical you get scared to the point where you don't know what you should do and I've been in that situation and it hurts you the most because you're feeling it on your skin. If someone punches you it hurts. But with cyber, you can kind of go, "I can ignore that for a bit" but with physical you can't ignore it because it's always going to be there. (Yr 9 girl, school C)*
- *the sort of bullying that is really bad is where they build up saying "I'm going to come and get you" and keep building it up but never actually do anything but you build it up and say to yourself "they're really going to do this to me" -- and then you feel self-conscious and scared of everything. (Year 9 girl, school A)*
- *Mental. Like something that is going to stick with them. Like the SEU³ people. People that have a disability. People have no feelings for them you know. And just diss them. Just diss them all the time. And they haven't done nothing to them. (Year 9 boy, school B)*

Cyber bullying: It was noted that Year 9 girls at school A spoke about gossiping, rumours and 'cyber' interchangeably. When asked about this, the girls indicated that 'cyber' is often the vehicle used to spread rumours and misinformation about someone.

- *[They are the] same. You can gossip on Facebook, like say, there's a photo and someone posted it from someone else but they didn't want it up there and then all these comments – its kind of like rumours but posted on like a page. Or somebody could say something and you misread it or you say something. Because you can't hear tone. (Year 9 girls, school A)*

So while students did not make frequent references to 'cyber bullying' when discussing bullying incidents, it can be inferred from the wider conversations that some of the gossiping, name calling, rumours and other behaviours discussed involved the use of social networking technologies.

Most of the 63 students, including the majority of the Year 6 students, indicated they use technologies such as msn, Skype and Facebook to communicate with their friends. Year 6 students indicated there was "not much bullying on their contact list" but, as one student added, "it's in the news a lot." No clear picture on the extent of cyber bullying emerged from discussions with Year 9s.

Students said they were aware of techniques they could use if bullied such as blocking messages, putting settings on private, deleting friends and printing conversations. All school groups indicated they had received information sessions on how to manage cyber bullying.

Gender differences: Most students in six of the eight groups had a view that there were gender differences when it came to how kids bullied. The Year 9 boys (school B) and Year 6 boys (school E) said either there was 'no difference' or 'they didn't know'. However the dominant view was that boys

³ Special Education Unit

use more physical forms of bullying while girls are more likely to gossip and spread rumours, and *'with girls it goes on and on for ages.'*

A gender difference was evident in the bullying forms and situations the groups focused on during discussion. The girls' groups talked more about rumours and gossiping while the examples the boys' groups gave were more often about physical acts and name calling.

(iii) why kids are bullied

Numerous reasons were given for why some students are bullied. The reasons given by the different groups can be categorised as follows. A person who is bullied:

- **is 'vulnerable' in some way** – *has family issues; appears physically or emotionally weak; is new to the school, how they carry themselves; is not as good at sport or as smart; has a shy personality; is unpopular*
- **is different in some way** – *wears glasses, has freckles, chubby, different colour skin, has a different opinion, has a disability, who they hang out with, "the shape of their eyebrows"*
- **has something the bully is jealous of** – *is smarter, prettier, has a boyfriend/girlfriend, good at sport, popular, parents who aren't divorced, or possessions, "like a lunchbox or mobile phone."*

There was a common view that the initiating reason can be *'silly stupid things'* and a *"small incident can escalate into something more serious"*. For example, some Year 9 girls said bullying often starts off with:

- *Fights between friends and then they end up telling rumours so that people get on their side of the argument -- And a lot of things get taken the wrong way and then that gets worse from there. (Year 9 girls, school C)*

When asked what kids can do if they are bullied (see page 30), a number of students spoke about how the behavior of the person being bullied can encourage or discourage the bully to continue. They indicated the bullying was more likely to continue if the student:

- **'reacted'** and showed they were angry, upset or frightened
- **'didn't stand up for themselves'** by telling the bully to stop, and /or
- **had no friends** around to support them.

There was also a view expressed by some Year 9 students that they were at a **developmental age** where they are more sensitive to the actions and comments of others which in turn made bullying more of an issue. The following statement made by a Year 9 girl, was echoed by a Year 9 male:

- *if you say something little at this age, it means a lot to you even if it's little. But when you're like 2 or you're 10 and you're in prep and stuff its not going to mean anything. You really don't care at that age. You haven't got – you're not going through stuff we're going through at the moment – and that's why I think that bullies fight and take sides because everyone just takes things serious.* (Year 9 girl, school C)

(iv) what kids who bully are like

There was not a particular characteristic which was consistently used to describe students who bully. The following list categorises the descriptions students gave, loosely ranked in order of the frequency in which they were mentioned across the groups (most frequent first).

Students who bully others were described as either:

- having family issues and/or their own problems – *are bullied at home; have a bad day and take it out on someone*
- have been bullied themselves
- are the popular or 'cool kids' or want to be –
 - *There's this girl and she makes up lots of rumours ..to put other people down so she can be the most popular in the group. So she makes people believe bad things about the people so they don't like that person and then nothing's bad said about her so that's why she's being liked less.* (Year 6 girl, school E)
- want to build up their image, confidence or reputation – *they are the "try hards."*
- have a high estimation of themselves – *bullies can be stuck up; think they're big and can get it on with anybody.* (Year 9 girl; year 9 boy, school B)
- enjoy bullying others – *bullies sometimes just bully people for fun.* (Year 6 boy, school D)
- bully to 'hide their own weaknesses' – *they're insecure; don't like themselves; they're not as smart, or can't run as fast; are jealous*
- are acting out learned behaviour – *have seen their parents fighting are imitating that, have not been told the right way to behave by their parents.*

There were different views about whether or not the bully had friends. The stronger view was that a bully is: 'a person who has lots of mates to back him up if someone stands up to him' (Year 6 boy, school E) or as another student put it:

- *A bully is nothing without his posse. If his posse turns on him, he's stuffed.* (Year 9 boy, school C)

Three students who participated in the focus groups openly acknowledged that they had bullied others in the past. They were all boys in Year 9. One student admitted he:

- *used to bully everyone at state school [and] "I hit people and picked on the same kid every day – like almost every day – almost every week.*

When asked what made him target that person, he explained:

- *I don't know. So sometimes he had a smart mouth sometimes. Smartness, yes. Sometimes he would, like, go through people's bags and that sometimes, you know. He went through my bag one day, and I started hitting him soon. But the first time I just went up to him and just start hitting him. That was the first time.*

(v) why some kids watch or join in

Students were asked why some kids watch or join in when they see someone else being bullied. The reasons they put forward can be categorised (and ranked in order of frequency) as follows:

- **Fear of consequences:**
 - *'fear of being bullied themselves' if they intervene or draw attention to themselves*
 - *fear they might 'get the blame if try to stop it'*
 - *fear of being 'kicked out of the group' or 'they might lose their friends'*
 - *fear of being 'the odd one out' or 'seen as a wuss'.*
- **Get some satisfaction** from it – they are *'entertained'* by watching; join in to *'get a piece of the action'* or stand back because they *'don't like the person being bullied either'*.
- **'Don't know what to do'** – or *'lack confidence'*
- **Want to assist** – either to assist the bully because he/she is a *'family member or close friend'* or to *'help the person being bullied'*.
- **Following the herd** – *because you're kind of a group... Because my friends are doing it. That is why I am doing it.* (Year 9 girl, school B)

The fear of being hurt by the bully was the most cited reason.

Fear of being alienated by their friendship group was a principal theme raised by a group of Year 9 girls. As one student explained:

- *if the bully has higher status in a group and you belong to that group, if you go against them you'll most likely get kicked out but you don't want to do that because I want to be in the group.* (Year 9 girl, school A)

(vi) what it feels like to be bullied

Although students were not asked to, some students indicated in the course of discussion they had been, or were being, bullied. Their comments provide insights into how it feels to be bullied and the affects it can have on a student's social or emotional wellbeing. The following is a discussion between a subset of Year 9 students in one group:

- *bullying stays with someone forever .. sometimes you forget about it, sometimes you move on from it but other times it just sticks with you.*
- *Thing is sometimes they just give you one or two comments and they leave it alone and they just let it eat at you.*
- *It just drops your spirit as well.*
- *It leaves you hanging.*
- *And you also feel like you can't tell someone a lot of the time because you think I'll just get even more bullied. Everyone will call me, dibber-dobber and tell you you shouldn't have whinged and dobbed on them because there's no real point in it. You feel like you can't really tell anyone. You feel like you can't win.*
- *You're excluded.*

This comment from a Year 6 girl also sums up the feelings some students conveyed:

- *you feel bad about it, every single day, all the time and so you keep on thinking about it and it just worries you all the time so it sort of takes over your life. (Year 6 girl, school E)*

How kids rated bullying as a problem

All of the 63 students who participated were asked to anonymously rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how big a problem they thought bullying was for kids in general, with 10 indicating it was a huge problem. Fifty-five of the students were also asked to anonymously rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how big a problem bullying was for them personally, and to give reasons for their ratings⁴.

The aim of this process was twofold: (i) to gauge the difference between students' perception of the problem and their actual experience of it and (ii) to allow students to confidentially and anonymously share something they might not otherwise disclose.

An examination of mean scores revealed that bullying as a general problem was rated more highly by the students than bullying as a personal problem. As depicted in Figure 1, the mean scores were 7.8 and 5.7 respectively. These differences were found to be statistically significant. The result indicates that collectively this group of students perceive bullying to be a greater problem than their actual experience of it.

⁴ Students in the first focus group were not asked to rate how big a problem bullying was for them personally.

Figure 1. Comparison of mean scores – bullying in general and bullying as a problem personally

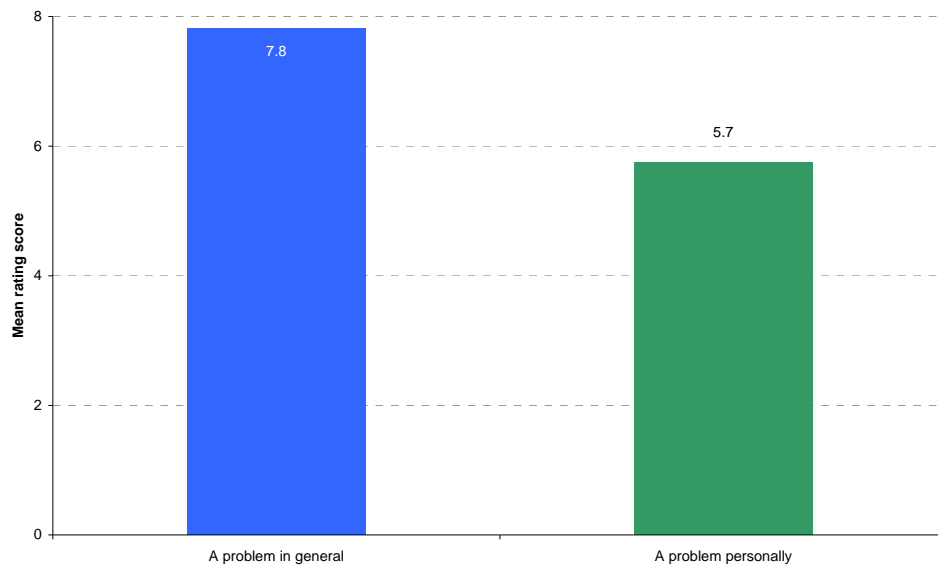
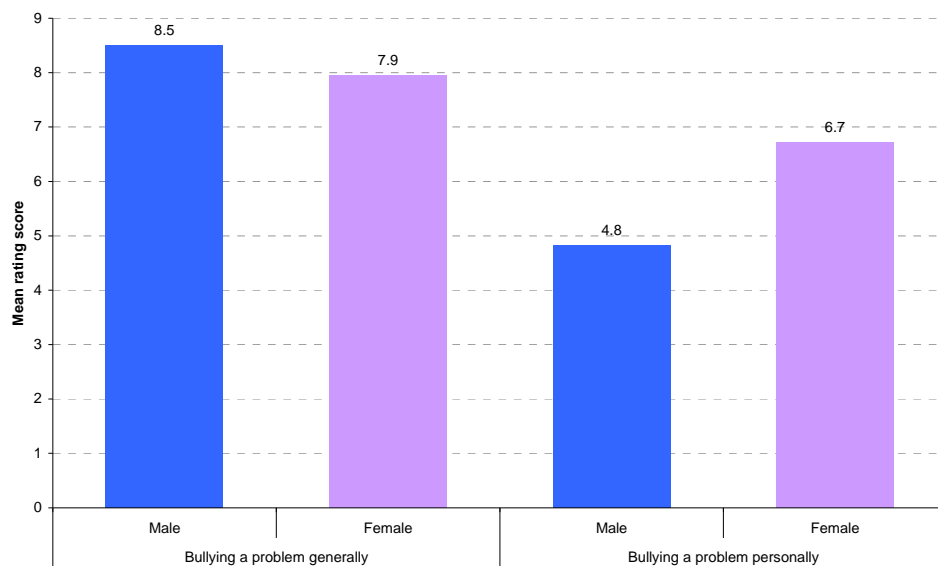


Figure 2. Differences between the genders – for both bullying as a problem personally and in general:



A statistically significant difference was also found according to gender, with girls rating bullying as a personal problem more highly than boys. As Figure 2 shows, the mean scores were 6.7 and 4.8 respectively. No differences according to gender were found for ratings of bullying as a general problem. There were also no differences according to student Year level.

The reasons students gave for their scores for bullying as a general problem related to how prevalent they thought bullying was, or its potential for harm. They generally rated bullying as a personal problem based their own or their friends' experience.

The following is a sample of the students' responses. They provide valuable insights into how students perceive bullying and their actual experience.

Year level	Gender	Rating problem in general	Reason for rating	Rating problem personally	Reason for rating
6	F	10	It makes kids feel bad	10	It makes me feel bad about myself
6	F	7	I think it is a problem and we have to deal with it but it is not the biggest problem	8	I think it is a big problem for me because it happens occasionally
6	F	9	Because it means that kids feel bad about themselves and they don't want to go to school	6	Because I was bullied for a short time in grade 2 and I know how it feels but I haven't ever been bullied again and I rose above it
6		4	It does happen but not every day	1	It rarely happens to me
6	F	6	Most bullying is being handled by programs but some bullying is still happening and not much is being done about it	8	Because I feel really bad because I know that some people around me are being bullied and they are troubled and confused because of it
6	M	9	I think it is so high because some kids can be bullied day after day and it wouldn't be nice for them	3	It is that low 'cause I don't really have anything for people to be mean to me about
6	M	10	I think this because if the government lets this go, kids would not come to school because of fear	8	Because I have been bullied this year but it's been dealt with and I am not so worried about it anymore
6	M	3	I think this because most kids would just want to play and have fun	2	Because I think people just would like to fit in
6	F	7	I think this because I see a lot of kids being bullied and its on the news a lot, mostly physical	10	This is because a girl in my class bullies me. She calls me names and spread 2 rumours about me which made me feel very sad for a week
9	F	8	In most schools more than half of them are called names every day	1	I get called a few names but I know they are mucking around
9	F	9	It happens so much and so often	6	It has happened to me a bit before and I've seen it happen to others with their friends and parents
9	F	8	Because if one person hates you everyone hates you	5	Because people get angry over small things
9	F	7	I think this is 7 'cause it is bad and people get really hurt by it but some people don't get bullied.	7	Cause I think I'm bullied without them knowing it and if someone doesn't like me for something they pass it around so no one really does
9	F	9	Because lots of people get hurt and some even lose their life	4	Because I don't want to get hurt. Its not a nice feeling
9	F	6	It happens everywhere but in the majority of cases it isn't severe	4	It doesn't effect me so much but everyone gets called names. I was bullied a while ago so I have more of an understanding now
9	F	7	It could be really bad till it gets dangerous like some kids could go suicide for their problem	4	It is a problem to me personally because it affects me.. some people make rumours of how they describe me .. it hurt feelings
9	M	9	You cant' stop it and its in every school and every class	5	It still happens but I've learned to ignore it
9	M	7.5	Most kids will deal with bullying differently, with each different situation	8.9	I have been bullied since grade 1 and have mental scars that will stay with me for the rest of my life
9	M	10	Because if they are bullying it will carry on through ages	4	Because I haven't had a fight in years
9	M	10	I believe bullying is a massive problem for young people as almost everyone is bullied who aren't bullies.	10	A huge problem as I have been bullied all my life and it hasn't stopped
9	M	8.5	Because all kids at one time or another experience bullying	6	Because I don't get picked on as much as I used to
9	M	7	Because many kids get bullied every day	1	Because I don't get bullied

Note: Spelling as per students' written comments.

2. Developing and implementing an anti-bullying policy

What the Toolkit says:

Element 3 of the *Working Together Toolkit* recommends schools establish a clear **anti-bullying policy** developed in collaboration with staff, students and parent/carers which addresses all forms of bullying (including cyber bullying).

The Toolkit –

- recommends a school's anti-bullying policy contain a statement that clearly identifies the school's stance and action
- recommends that schools engage with all members of the school community when developing the policy, particularly students and parents/carers
- refers to expert advice that engaging students in the process of policy development, particularly as it relates to cyber bullying, is a critical factor in ensuring its successful implementation
- suggests anti-bullying policies may be developed as part of the process of developing the school's wider behaviour policy
- states the success of a school's policy is largely dependent on how well it is communicated and understood within the school community
- suggests the policy may be used to celebrate the school's commitment to the safety of all students
- recommends the policy be reinforced to the school community throughout the year, including the start of each school year, and using opportunities such as a designated day of action, assemblies, newsletters, website

What students said about:

(i) who should be involved in deciding what the policy says

There was a strong collective view that “**everyone**” in the school should be involved in deciding what a school's anti-bullying policy says:

- *all the students that go to the school and the teachers; people who look after the school, parents, P&C, Principal, teacher's aide.* (Year 6 students, school D)

Students: Foremost, there was virtually unanimous agreement that **students** should, and would want to be, involved. Typical comments were:

- *All students – all people need to have their say. It shouldn't be just the principal and staff. It should be what the students think.* (Year 9 girls, school B)
- *Students. Always. Students all the way. Students know what type of bullying is out there. You know what the worst is, they know what to deal with first.* (Year 9 boy, school C)

Only one group spoke of restricting which grades could be involved, with four Year 6 boys (school E) suggesting it should:

- *probably be only the higher grades like 6s and 7s -- and maybe some of the year 5s -- the smart year 5s.*

While they agreed it was important for younger kids to know what the plan is, “*probably not all of them [could be involved in developing it] because there’d be too much*”. Interestingly, this view contrasted with that of the Year 6 girls from the same school who said:

- *They should have an open vote so children can have some input on it – all children can do it but you don’t have to use all the ideas that are given.*

The girls suggested that “*for the younger kids there might be a fun way of doing it – like colour in your opinion or something*”.

The Year 9 students were the most vocal about the need for students to be involved, and adamant that the majority of students would want to be involved:

- *Especially the middle years because I think that’s where most of the bullying goes on. (Year 9 boy, school C)*

A number of Year 6 and Year 9 students indicated it was important to involve “*people who have been affected by bullying*”. As some Year 9 girls (school B) explained:

- *They would say its shame, but I reckon the kids that have actually been bullied and have been really hurt would want to be in it.--- ‘Cos they want to deter it’ ---- want to stop it happening to others ----Yeah. They don’t want the experience.*

School Staff: All groups said that teachers and the principal should be involved. However, a common view among Year 9’s in particular was that staff do not always know what’s going on. This comment, made by a Year 9 girl (school B) is a typical example:

- *they [principal and staff] don’t really ever get the full aspect of why people are bullying each other and everything so they’ve got like no idea.*

Comments from Year 9 students indicated that the principal was seen as being the most removed from the bullying. By contrast the Year 6 students indicated their principals were most involved. This may be due to the comparative size of the participating primary and secondary schools.

Guidance officers, counsellors, pastoral care coordinators, and certain teachers were singled out by some students as important people to have involved in working out the policy. For example, a Year 9 girl (school A) suggested that students:

- *work it out with – not the principal but a really trustworthy teacher or school counsellor or someone that deals with that sort of stuff every day so they know what is going on – whilst the principal might not know everything that’s happening.*

Parents: Students expressed different views about why, and to what degree, parents should be involved in developing a school’s anti-bullying policy. Year 6 students were firmly of the view that

parents should have a say, as were the majority of Year 9 students. Reasons for involving parents included:

- *because they have a right to know what the policy is with the teachers (Yr 6 girl, school E).*
- *because parents can kind of enforce it at home. (Year 9 girl, school A)*
- *[it's] their kids that need protection at school. They come to school to learn not to get bashed up. Parents can then complain. (Year 9 girl, school B)*
- *they are the ones who experience the effects on the students at home plus the parents are also worried for their own children – for their kids own safety. (Year 9 boy school C)*

By contrast, a subset of Year 9 girls in one group said that parents should not be involved because:

- *parents don't matter at school*
- *bullying has changed since parents were are school*
- *parents don't know cyber.*

(ii) why students want to be involved

Three reasons were repeatedly given for why students want to be involved:

- **It is their experience.**
- **The policy will be more effective.**
- **They want their views heard.**

It is their experience: This was the dominant reason. Typical comments were:

- *really I think it [the policy] should be made by the students because the student are the ones who are witness to it – the students are the ones who experience it, they're the ones who are affected by it. The teacher can make it but they're not out they're not bullied.. or out there bullying. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *Its the students so you should ask the students what they have to say. What they feel they can and can't do when they're being bullied, 'cos they kind of think we can just walk up to the office and say "Hey, I'm getting bullied" but you can't. (Year 9 girls, school B)*
- *because the teacher and principal, since they're not kids, like the kids being bullied, they probably don't know what would work best .. how it could be stopped ...might not be as good without a child's opinion. (Year 6 girl, school E)*

- *If the staff and principal just do it [make the plan] then they might actually not know what happens. They might come up with something that they've heard of, but they don't actually know what the kids are going through. Maybe the parents do, but they might see it differently to the kids so they should let the kids say what [to] do. So if they have a plan, they know what happens and what the solution [is].* (Year 6 girl, school E)
- *The students are experiencing what happens - and staff don't know* (Year 9 boy, school B)

The policy will be more effective: Students said the policy is more likely to work if they are involved:

- *if you make it up you want to stick to it. But if it's just made up by somebody you don't even know, you don't have interest, you don't want to bother with [it]. But if your friend did or you did, you want to stick to it.* (Year 9 girl, school A)
- *If kids have a say in making the rules well then they might be less likely to break them. Instead of "do this do that" you know "this is what we have chosen to do so now I'm going to do that."* (Year 9 girl school A)
- *the teachers would have something to use against the bullies because if the teachers said "You know, the students made this, this is what the students wanted, how come you're not abiding by it?" it would make the bully feel "good point."* (Year 9 boy, school C)
- *the children might not agree and they might not go by the plan because they didn't have any say in it, they didn't agree and so it just causes strife.* (Year 6 girl, school E)
- *classes should be able to choose representatives ..and they should make a plan and hand it to the teachers to check and if teachers say that's okay that's the plan because that way there's going to be an effective way to deal with it, not a way that teachers thought up ...they don't know how it's happening, they don't know where it's happening, they don't know when it's happening, they just know it's happening.* (Year 9 boy, school C)
- *[without us] it wouldn't work because obviously what the kids want is not really what the staff think is right -- they'd be totally different to 14 year olds.* (Year 9 girl, school B)

They want their views heard: Students have a viewpoint that is likely to differ from that of adults and they want to be heard and understood:

- *I hate it when adults automatically assume that since you're younger than them, you're automatically going to agree with them ---- It happens with my parent all the time.--- And the same happens with the school. They assume since they thought the plan's good, we're going to think the plan's good. We're not.* (Year 9 boys, school C)
- *if the adults did it would be from the adults point of view not the children's, and the children might not understand, they will be like "what does that mean" because they didn't have any input* (Year 6 girl, school E)

- *Older adults don't understand a child's point of view. For instance, say I got bullied and I tell my mum and then she might say "Oh she is just trying to do this. She is just trying to get you to be her friend" or something like that. And they treat – they won't understand. They just try and so if you compare a child's point of view with an adult's about the school, it would be completely different because the adult isn't actually the person at that situation. And so a child's opinion would be a lot better – (Year 6 girl, school E)*
- *they're a different generation and we're a different generation too (Year 9 boy, school B)*

(iii) ways of involving students in policy development

A variety of ways were suggested for getting students involved. There was **no "best way"**.

Some students said they would prefer to have their say in a group while others said they would rather write something down. A number of Year 6 students said some kids would be more comfortable giving their opinions anonymously, so their *"names would not be called out"*. It was clear from the students' discussions that **more than one method** should be used.

Repeatedly suggested methods were:

- **surveys**
- **voting**
- **writing their views down**
- **small group or class discussion.**

Other suggested methods for getting students' input into the policy were:

- debates
- an anonymous suggestions box
- asking friends from other schools to make suggestions
- doing murals of role models and getting students to write their messages up
- *have a sausage sizzle and instead of getting them [students] to pay money – they pay us input (Year 9 boy, school C)*

Many of the students who said they would prefer to have their say in a group suggested *'small groups just like this'* [that is a focus group]. The Year 6 boys (school E) said it was *'definitely the best way'*.

Whatever the method/s, a strong message was that *'every person has a chance to say at least one thing'* and *'not just certain people from each grade'*. Some suggested ways of going about it were:

- *they could get these A4 bits of paper and each student gets one – [and writes down their opinion on] how the school could be changed and they staple it all together -- and make like a book of ideas (Year 6 boy, school E)*
- *I reckon the students from each year level – the 1-2s they should be able to make a draft for bullying and then the junior years should .. and the middle years we should be able to make our own and then senior years should be able to make their own – make drafts ...relevant to their year level. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- *for the younger kids you might have a fun way of doing it – colour in your opinion or something --- and for the older kids – a vote or a survey --- the year 7s can go around to the school's older students and they could give them a piece of paper and they write something that might have happened to them. And probably the most amount of bullying, like calling names – whichever bullying thing had the most amount, they could kind of make up a plan and try to stop that one and maybe try another survey. (Yr 6 girl, school E)*
- *Get them to write on a piece of paper, on a form and then we just hand it to the principal and the principal can read it. **Just need to get their voice heard.** (Year 9 boy, school B)*
- *well the principal should talk to the staff and then they should actually get the parents to do a survey as well so the parents know what's going on and they can actually agree to it. So they think "Oh OK yes that's fine" and all parents and staff and teachers, staff, parents, everyone, adults should have a survey saying" this is what should go in and why we think that and how it can be stopped." (Year 6 girl, school E)*

(iv) communicating the anti-bullying policy

Students said it was important '**everyone**' know about the policy. Several students explicitly said **teachers** and **parents** should be told as well as students:

- *New teachers – in staff meetings*
- *all teachers not just some*
- *every teacher – because you don't know which teacher is going to get involved.*
- *They could also send a note home tak[ing] some parts out of it [the policy] what is the problem and then what is their solution to it. And then the parents can see what their policy plan is, so they know what is going to happen. And if it happens then they know what to do. (Year 6 girl, school E)*
- *The teachers could do a session on it to the class so everyone understands it – and parents could do a session too – like have a special interview meeting. (Year 6, school D)*

A Year 9 boy (school B) made the point that '**new kids** should get told when enrolling' adding '*I reckon you control it during enrolment*'.

Understanding the policy: Students were asked to suggest ways of making sure everyone understands the plan. They came up with a range of ideas. Their ideas indicate they want the message delivered in multiple ways: visually, verbally, in writing, and acted out. Many of communication mediums suggested have two common features. They involve:

- **demonstration** of bullying scenarios and solutions with follow-up discussion, and/or
- **actively involve kids** in delivering the message.

There was a strong sense that demonstrations of scenarios and solutions must be accompanied by discussion, and when students deliver the message, they want to do it in imaginative and creative ways. This is evident from the methods which, when suggested by a student, drew support from other students in the group. They were:

- *don't just say it – you've got to reinforce [the message] --- yeah do a skit – like acting it out so people are going to pay attention if somebody is actually doing something. [Rather than] someone just speaking make it interesting, mix it up a bit and show everyone how you can help – show a scenario and how to fix it --- reminding people in different ways in an ongoing way what the policy is. (Year 9 girls school A)*
- *You've got to get, like, kids saying it or something – 'cos they listen to kids. (Year 9 girls, school B)*
- *Say for example the school made a character – almost a superman figure and he's in a big picture that says "Don't bully, it's bad, I wouldn't do that " and that can be for the preps. -- They could take a vote in their class and think of their favourite superhero -- and tally up the votes – and whoever is their favourite superhero they could have that on the poster. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- *You could make a movie about it. -- Yeah and you could put a little reading with it and say "well this is how bullying has affected this person, tell a story about it and stuff" -- And you think about how it feels to be bullied. Think about it from the bully's perspective. Then if you come from the victim's point of view it sort of changes the whole factor of the way you think about it, you know what I mean. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- *We could make up a catchy slogan .. like a catch phrase .. the little kids could make one, the early years could make one, the junior years could make one, the middle years and then the senior years could make one. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- *Have a mascot that would go around the classes and they'd help people who were being bullied, or they'd give the class good ideas on how to help people who were being bullied. (Year 6 students, school D)*
- *Most people listen when the year 7s come to our class ... so maybe they should go around the school and have a chat with each class. (Year 6 girls, school E)*
- *A play a term. (see details under 'reinforcing the policy' below)*

Notably, the value of using drama and students as mediums was also evident in the list of things the students nominated when asked to name the best thing their school has done to combat bullying. (See page 44). Those things included:

- performances by an external Theatre group
- being shown a video about bullying and discussing it
- role plays by grade 7s on each of the types of bullying
- a whole of school activity in which students wrote anti-bullying messages on coloured hands strung up around the school.

Other ways students suggested the policy be communicated were:

- *Posters that aren't boring, bright colours*
- *a quote of the day, every day*
- *In the classrooms there should be like, discussion, like here*
- *On Facebook and the school's intranet*
- *In the newsletter and student handbook*

(v) reinforcing the policy – how often and in what ways

Most groups said the school community should be **continually** reminded of what the policy says. Several groups made suggestions about doing something additional **each term**:

- *Every term someone could come and talk to us about bullying and the new things that have been added to our plan. (Year 6 girl, school D)*
- *A survey at the beginning and end of term to see if opinions change. (Yr 9 girl, school E)*
- *A play – we have in one every year but that's not really often enough – we should have one every term – because that's four a term.--- Different issues that happen at school every term and they could do it on a two year cycle. --- Just mix it up, do different social issues, performances. --- It's like the way the curriculum keeps on cycling ...then we could mix it into the curriculum as learning – intertwining it, if you want to put it that way. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- *And every time they had a period of time when they've got a certain, really big amount of complaints about bullying, they could remind people again and so probably at different points it would go down a bit but later in the year when everyone gets tired and restless it will probably go back up again and they could remind them at a time the complaints come up again. (Year 6 girl, school E)*
- *Regular talks about it – keep talking about it. (Year 9 boys, school B)*

Keeping track of bullying: Year 6 girls (school E) indicated it was important for schools to survey students to find out what forms of bullying were most common and have some mechanism for keeping track of bullying complaints. Year 9 boys (school C) also suggested that teachers should keep a record of *‘those students who are bullying.’*

- *They should collect all complaints from people and keep an eye on the bullies’ names who are repeated and kind of have a little chat with them – but you don’t actually say out loud “oh we found a bully and these people have been our main victims.”* (Year 6 girl, school E)
- *There could be a teacher, a special teacher you could go to and you could just talk about it with them – so if you were getting bullied or you knew someone you could just tell that teacher anonymously. And then that teacher would be in charge of all the bullying that goes around in the school and they could keep track. They could tell the principal when something was getting a bit out of hand and if the parents needed to know. There is someone to keep track of everything.* (Year 6 girls, school E)
- *You should keep a record of who the student is that’s actually bullying because if someone else is subject to the bullying, then they can just ...The bullies don’t always pick on the one person. Like sometimes they do, but it’s normally a variety of students. And one problem with our structure is if they’re good for so many weeks, then they’re back up to independent which means it’s a warning the next time.* (Year 9 boys, school C)

(vi) values and behaviours a policy should encourage

Students were asked what positive values and behaviours an anti-bullying policy should encourage. *‘Respect’* was a recurring theme across all groups. Collectively, students said:

- Respect others
- Understand and accepting differences
- Treat others as you want them to treat you
- Be inclusive
- Be caring and supportive
- Be safe

When responding to this question, Year 6 students at school D talked about how important it is to be connected and included. They made this very practical suggestion:

- *start up a game cause sometimes when you just sit around bullying can happen and gossiping and rumours. So maybe at lunchtime cause what we do it we start up a game – games that include lots of people – each Thursday in our big break our class elect a game and like refs and captains and we have a field and then the whole class plays against each other.* (Year 6 students, school D)

3. Developing procedural steps to respond to bullying incidents

What the Toolkit says:

Element 4 of the *Working Together Toolkit* recommends schools collaboratively develop procedural steps to appropriately respond to bullying incidents that are clearly documented and clearly define the roles and responsibilities of staff, students and parents/carers.

The Toolkit –

- recommends implementing clear and effective systems that students and parents/carers can use to report bullying behavior, supported by a school staff aware of reporting procedures
- refers to research findings that students who are covertly bullied seek help from their friends most often, followed by their parents /carers, then by a teacher or staff member; with one third of males and 23% of females not seeking help from anyone – highlighting the need for all members of the community to be involved in developing appropriate reporting methods
- suggests a range of reporting methods may be used which could include electronic bully boxes, secret ballot techniques, consumer satisfaction surveys
- cites that reporting systems are of value when students have confidence their concerns will be treated promptly and seriously and action taken that will not make their situation worse; can access reporting routes easily; know who will deal with their concerns and have trust in both them and the systems the school uses, and are aware malicious reporting will be taken seriously
- emphasises the importance of parental reporting and identifies what is required for methods to be most effective
- identifies a range of intervention strategies which may be effective in responding to bullying incidents including the traditional disciplinary approach, strengthening the target, mediation, restorative practice, support group method and method of shared concern
- recommends that the students involved and interventions applied must be monitored over time

What students said about:

(i) what actions kids can take when bullying occurs:

If bullied themselves, students in every group said they had three options:

- ignore it/walk away
- be assertive and tell the bully to “*stop, I don’t like it*” or
- tell someone.

If they witness someone else being bullied, most students indicated the options were to:

- tell the bully to stop
- walk away with the person being bullied and
- report it.

The degree of confidence students expressed in these processes varied by group and by Year level.

Year 6 students generally expressed confidence in these processes. They indicated that ignoring 'the bully' or being assertive was sometimes enough and the statements they made about reporting to teachers were generally positive. For example:

- *Sometimes I just say "stop being rude. It's not nice; it's not cool." I just say those sort of things. Until you get other friends and try and not gang up but just show them. -- Show them they're not the best. --- When you stand up for yourself, don't be like the bully, but make yourself feel like there's not anything wrong.* (Year 6 girls, school E)

Year 9 students expressed less confidence in these processes. One group of Year 9 students in particular was quite pessimistic. At this stage, it is important to note that the students in every group made positive comments about their respective schools. Rather the implication was they did not feel the choices they had for dealing with bullying were effective.

Examples of their concerns about walking away and being assertive included:

- *thing is you walk away they can follow you. People tell you to walk away. It's called "They walk with you".*
Where do you walk to though?
You can't walk anywhere really. You can walk to the office and that's it but if you're on the oval they're going to be able to haunt you the whole way up. (Year 9 boy, school C)
- *I don't think people are going to want to just stop it. Like I think you would have to say something like "piss off" because they're not going to listen to you if you just say "Stop it I don't like it."* (Year 9 girl, school B)
- *[Telling them to stop] it depends how big that person because if you're small .. you can't do anything to them. --- The only chance you have is to run [and]--- if they have a big group, they can cut you off..* (Year 9 boys, school C)

Reporting was cited as often ineffectual because 'nothing happens' or 'it makes things worse'. (See page 33). Consequently, some students resort to alternative strategies, as demonstrated by the separate conversations of two subsets of Year 9 boys:

Group 1:

- *and if you know there's a certain place [the bully] hangs out, try to avoid that place.*
- *Go to the library..*
- *but you want to buy tuckshop Just go through here, just come round this side instead ... and get your mate to get you something in the line...*
- *but it shouldn't have to get to that*
- *It shouldn't have to, but if that's what you have to do to avoid bullying, then I suppose its sort of working.*
- *That's bullying. We should be able to walk around freely and talk to people without having people by our sides.*
- *And scared.*
- *[We should be able to] feel safe anywhere in school.*

Group 2:

- *the library's really a pretty good place to seek refuge cause the teachers are there and they notice if something's getting too rowdy*
- *but the problem with the library is ichtat [school intranet]*
- *That's one way we get bullied – people ichtat “I hate you” and “stuff you” and I'm gonna hit you”*

(ii) telling someone

All groups indicated it was important for kids who are bullied to tell someone, even if they did not report it. Two themes emerged when students talked about telling someone. Students want:

- **to tell someone they can trust**
- **someone to listen**

Someone you can trust: When asked who kids should tell, the most consistent response across the groups was “*someone you can trust.*”

- *I'd usually go to someone I can trust and I'll tell them. (Year 9 boy, school B)*
- *you've got to trust – because there's some teachers that will go out and say “You did this to so-and-so” and then the bully will go “Oh I'm going to go and get them back.” (Year 9 girl, school A)*

Someone who will listen: Some students also said there are times when they simply want someone to listen, not necessarily to ‘fix’ it for them:

- *even if like, telling speaking your feelings to someone ..if you know they're not going to spread it ...sometimes telling somebody makes you feel a whole lot better. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *A person who you can go to, but not have them give a whole lot of advice – well it depends if you want it – because I hate it when somebody gives me all this advice and things and you just – you don't want advice you just want to tell someone about it. (Year 6 girl, school E)*
- *A counsellor or someone at the school [who] can give you advice on how to do it yourself, how to solve it yourself without getting anyone else involved. (Year 9 girl, school C)*

Who they would tell. When asked who they trust to tell, students generally nominated someone they knew, such as a teacher, parent, a close friend, older sibling, other relative or a school counsellor. For example, two Year 9 students said:

- *I trust my teacher and even though it may escalate to something worse at least I will have someone on my side. She's more powerful and it'll help me regain my friends... I trust my teacher she's one who will listen. (Year 9 girl, school C)*

- *My cousin in school. He has had a lot of experience with abuse and bullying, and he just – he always tells me, you've just got to walk away. Yes. You've got to take your mind off it and go and play footy or something. And just try to stay away from that person. (Year 9 boy, school B)*

Several Year 9 girls (school A) said it would be helpful:

- *if you had a friend, like a partner that you can go to, like anyone at any age in the school – to talk about your problems – like a buddy ----or one certain teacher or counsellor who comes in and keeps everything confidential and just someone to talk to---- but its really hard when you tell somebody because obviously they're going to want to fix it.*

Reference was made to telling teachers and parents more than friends were mentioned. Several students in different groups indicated that friends can't always be trusted. For example a subset of year 9 girls (school A) agreed that:

- *its really hard as well because you think you [can] trust some girls but then you tell them and they go around and tell everyone. Its hard to find a friend that you can trust completely that won't tell anyone.*

Not everyone said they would tell someone they know. Some students suggested they would prefer to talk to someone they didn't know, such as a counsellor or the Kids Helpline, instead of, or before, speaking to a parent or teacher. The Kids Helpline was mentioned by Year 6s as well as Year 9s.

- *someone who is experienced who can tell them what to do. (Year 6 girl, school E)*
- *in year 6 I saw a counsellor for a few weeks and that helped. And last year. It helps a lot to have someone you can talk to who's not going to tell anyone else – its not like it's your mum who's gonna let slip to one of her friends at a party and then everybody's gonna know. It's not like a teacher who might let slip at a conference or in a meeting. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *1800 kids line I always call that when I'm in trouble, When I, like, have trouble with my family. (Year 9 girl, school B)*
- *It would help to call the Kids Helpline because you can tell someone who can't get involved and really has no idea. But actually telling someone and having them sympathise with you. And just know there's someone on your side. (Year 9 girl, school C)*

(iii) why kids don't report

There was general agreement in every group that kids who are bullied or witness bullying should report it to a teacher, but students acknowledged that many kids don't. Year 9s discussed this more than Year 6s. Reasons given can be summed up as:

- **It can make things worse**
- **Nothing happens**
- **It's embarrassing**

It can make things worse. Students fear that reporting will make their situation worse. Not surprisingly, their worst fear is that the bully will find out. Associated fears are that they will be called dibber-dobbers by their peers or the bullying may be seen as their fault. Typical comments were:

- *they're scared the bully will hurt them even more. More than what they've been already. (Year 9 boy, school B)*
- *Everybody gets called the dibber-dobber if they go and tell – or even if they're a witness and they go to the office and have a statement straight away they're just in it. It doesn't matter. (Year 9 girl, school B)*
- *[You] try to express your feelings to the principal and how you feel when someone is bullying you – but you really can't express your feelings. Because they're just like – they like try to act like you're being bad and you can confess. (Year 9 girl, school B)*

Nothing Happens. A number of students also indicated that some kids give up reporting when nothing happens to fix their situation or their report is not believed. Unfortunately this can then lead to an escalation of the situation. For example, a Year 9 boy (school C) said:

- *At my old school, I've had incidents – this was where people were punching me and everything. I went to the teacher. The teacher didn't care because it was the new kid. He was popular. And it actually went to the point where he wouldn't stop hitting me, and I actually had to react and I walked away. And he came back after me and I had to react again, and I actually had to stop him from being able to hit me again. And I got into more trouble because I did more damaging – even though I'd told the teacher several times he was hitting me. There was people there saying, "He threw, like, eight punches before I threw the first one". And the problem is sometimes it's a case of if you're the kid who isn't often around with friends, if you're not that popular, you're more likely to not be believed.*

It's embarrassing. Students continually referred to bullying as **embarrassing**. *'It's embarrassing to tell the teacher', 'it's embarrassing to tell your parents', 'it's embarrassing if other kids find out'.*

- *You get embarrassed about telling someone. ---- Yeah. You'll seem like you're weaker and they'll make out like your weak because you told someone ----- Or you're just weak for not being able to do anything about it. And you tell someone and you think "Oh they probably think I can't handle my own problems". (Year 9 girls, school C)*

The feeling implied by students is best reflected in this comment from a Year 6 student who said, if she was bullied, she would:

- *feel sad, angry and disappointed in herself.*

There was also a sense in the discussions that kids who are bullied lose friends, as illustrated by this comment from a Year 9 boy:

- *You're just a source of – a sense of isolation because... if you've been bullied, not many people want to see you. (Year 9 boy, school C)*

(iv) what would make them comfortable about reporting

When asked what would make them more comfortable about reporting bullying incidents, the responses from students across all groups had two recurring themes. They would feel more comfortable about **reporting to teachers** if they:

- **Could trust it would be kept confidential and**
- **Know the problem would be fixed**

Students also spoke about who they prefer to report to in their school. It was clear from their comments that **relationships with teachers matter**.

Confidentiality: Students want to know they can trust the person they tell will keep their information confidential. Specifically, students in every group said it would make them more comfortable if the teacher they speak to about a bullying incident, does not use their name when dealing with the bully.

Many students used the term 'anonymous' as synonymous with 'confidential', especially the Year 6s, however a number of students actually want to be able to anonymously report bullying incidents. Their reasoning is that anonymity (or confidentiality when they report) will protect them from the bully, from being labelled a dobber and being further embarrassed.

- *Everything must be anonymous and confidential -- Otherwise they'll get bullied --Because – somehow, some way, it always leaks out that it was this person that said that and then other people go looking for them ---Yes like last year I had an incident down at the oval and I got hurt and I didn't tell anyone ...and then on assembly Mr [principal] said something – talked about it, and like how the hell did it get to that – because I only told my parents and I didn't hear them not once talk to the principal. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- *If you're being bullied, it would be much easier to tell the teacher ..if there's not a kid behind you, or there's not a kid going around saying "This person is bullying this person" like a private conversation with the teacher. (Year 6 student, school D)*
- *Cos ..telling a teacher is like a bit weird and hard. Cos you don't just go up to a teacher and say "Oh yeah this person has been bullying me". -- You don't tell them why. --Its a bit weird and uncomfortable. -- They want to know what or the names. -- It feels a bit awkward. Even if you ask for confidentiality. (Year 9 girls, school B)*
- *Some kids probably think "Oh, if I tell, the bully is going to find out and make it worse and everything." But if the teachers or seniors or other girls that encourage that no one is going to find out if you – like, it's all going to be confidential and like, if they can't do*

anything to you and everything, then they'd probably have more guts to like speak up.
(Year 9 girls, school A)

Maintaining confidentiality can present obvious difficulties for teachers (and parents). How do you help without disclosing what they have told you? The following comment from a Year 9 student illustrates what can happen from the student's perspective.

- *I think it's about trust, really, being able to trust the person you're telling because you don't want them to go off – I know – it happened to me last year. I told a teacher about something and she went off and told the other teachers, then all these teachers started getting involved. It's like I really need to trust the person that you're telling so you can be open.* (Year 9 girl, school C)

For those who wanted to report **anonymously** the most common suggestion put forward was the idea of a Box. Some Year 6 students (school D) said they already had a 'bully box' in their classroom. A subset of Year 9 girls (school C) explained their box idea this way:

- *I reckon that should be done once a week in every class and .. everyone has to put down at least one problem and some sort of solution like what you want done about it or don't want done about it. --- Or once a fortnight. --- And the teacher would get them out and read it to the class so everyone heard the problem and then she could help the person without directing it to them. Don't include names, [and if you want] you can write on it that you don't want it to be read out. You just want someone to know to get it off your chest.*

Knowing the problem will be fixed: Students also said that they would be more comfortable about reporting if they had "reassurance action will be taken," "that it gets fixed", that it will be "taken seriously", that there would be "consequences for the bully". Typical comments were:

- *Just have teachers who won't just sit there and say, "Oh, just get over it." Have teachers who will, as soon as you, you know, let them know or notify them of the bully, that they will act, they will let the right people know, they will, you know, get in and do stuff, because in a lot of my old schools, what'd they'd do is they'd just say, "Oh, just – you know, it'll be all right. Just get over it. You know, they'll – you know, they'll leave you alone eventually." ---- They [the bully] have to know it's going to be taken more seriously, then they are less likely to do it.* (Year 9 boys, school C)
- *tell stricter teachers – not those who will let them off with a warning* (Year 6 boy, school D)
- *Total confidentiality -- [and] that teachers will keep a closer eye on the bully. Instead of just passing it off sort of as "Oh they promised they won't do it again." --- And keep a closer eye on the student being bullied and the actual students who's bullying them. Make sure there's no interaction with them. And knowing that action will be taken.* (Year 9 boys, school C)
- *I don't think teachers deal with it all the time, most of the time they ignore it. Even if they do try and do it, they don't normally do it right. They'll give them a warning. I don't think*

going up to the person and saying “Well M told me that you’re bullying them so you’re in trouble now” kind of thing – that doesn’t work. (Year 9 girls, school C)

The value which students place on bullying incidents being handled confidentially and effectively is illustrated by the answers the Year 6 girls (school E) gave when asked what is the best thing their school has done to combat bullying. (See page 44.) Their answers included:

- *Probably that they sort [it] out as soon as possible so it gets stopped at the earliest moment and they don’t let it go on and so it won’t happen again --Some people in my class have been bullied badly and the teachers and principal have taken care of it really fast, and its anonymously and discreetly. -- If you’re bullied, it usually goes straight to the principal, there is no stuffing around with teachers that just give you like a warning or something. You go straight to the principal every time. (Year 6 girls, school E).*

Relationships with teachers matter: Who students report to often depends on the person not the role. This seems particularly so for Year 9 students. Their comments strongly suggest that many students are more comfortable about reporting when they perceive a connection with the teacher, while reporting to a teacher who they feel they have no relationship with can be problematic.

- *And some teachers have their own opinions of some students you know – favouritism is a big thing that teachers normally do – so there should be no favouritism when they’re dealing with it. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *when you were at school, remember those really old teachers that were really mean? Well no-one listens to them. No one does. But if you tell it to someone cool and they say “no this is not on guys. You know just break it up, stop being idiots” people will listen to them, because they think “Well you know they’re cool. I want to be like that person” so they’ listen to them. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *You might like [a particular teacher] more than a [particular counsellor]. Because she’s actually doing something not like the other teachers. And she gives a good vibe. She’s got a good relationship with most kids, she’s really nice. But if you get into trouble by her, she’s not short tempered. ---- You really need to know the person as well, because I wouldn’t go up to a stranger and like “Hey look at my problems”. We don’t need to know the counsellors – you don’t know them. Whereas Ms T gets around and does come and talk, like even at lunch break she’ll walk past and say hi and just talk to you and stuff whereas you never really see the other people. They are just strangers. ---- Yeah, counsellors just make you awkward. (Conversation among Year 9 girls, school C)*

The above views were echoed by Year 9 girls from school A who spoke about the need for teachers and students to do more to create positive relationships as a means of combating bullying.

- *have a good relationship with a teacher – but not like be a teachers pet have a good relationship with a teacher that you can approach and then if it happens [bullying] go and see that teacher straight away because they’ll be more inclined to listen to you and do something about it – but don’t be the teacher’s pet. (Year 9 girl, school A)*

- *when teachers are on ground duty – maybe they can walk around a bit more and just pay attention. See what’s going on in the different sitting groups. They can come in and have a conversation with students not just ‘hats ladies’ – some might call its eavesdropping but it’s for the safety of the students. (Year 9 girl, school A)*

Year 9 girls (school C) also emphasised the need for **teachers to model positive behaviours:**

- *a positive surrounding – some people coming home after school feel really bad because even the teacher yelled at them for not having something right----- and I know some teachers what do bully. And if some of the teachers stopped bullying, they would be a lot happier too. So they wouldn’t think it was okay. Because if teachers bully, then they think its okay to say this. And the teacher might be joking about like a whole class – she’s up in the front of the class and the whole class will hear it and then it’ll just be a long standing joke. I know that has happened to a few kids. ---- I think – change everyone’s approach on things. Some people approach things with an angry face and some people just calmly approach it. ---- I don’t think they [teachers] should be around kids if they’re bullying them. It’s their job to make us safe and for us to get taught by them and some just don’t. ---- I know heaps of kids what don’t come just because of the teacher.*

(iv) involving parents

Schools involving parents:

If a student is bullying others, their parents should be told. This was the consensus view across all groups. There were different views about whether or not the parent of the bully should be asked to come to the school for a meeting. Year 9 boys (school B) suggested it could just be making contact to say:

- *Your kids are being – mucking around – just want you to know – is there any problems at home or anything? [Then the parents] can help stop it by talking to them. In a calm way, not by yelling at them because you just feel angry and aggressive.*

A stronger approach was suggested by Year 9 boys in another group. Their view was:

- *The bullier, their parents should be told straight away. And they should have to come in, no matter what, even if its petty bullying.*

One boy, who admitted to bullying and being bullied, agreed parents should be told immediately, every time:

- *Parents should be told every time ‘cause I’ve had incidences when I’ve been bullied or I’ve bullied – I’m not proud to admit that I have bullied – and my mum hasn’t been notified until the day before a meeting with the teachers and she’s said it before, “I wanna be notified the day it happens not three or four weeks later” (Year 9 boy, school C)*

However, a view repeated in several groups was that:

- *calling parents is not much of a consequence, some parent just don’t care. (Year 9 girl, school A)*

If a student is being bullied, the view of a subset of Year 9 boys was that the school should notify the student's parents:

- *If its petty bullying then I think [their] parents should be notified of it, just to watch their son or daughter's behaviour but they shouldn't have a big sort of 'hubabub' about it. If its serious there should be a big hubabub ---- they come into the school, they speak with the other parents here. (Year 9 boys, school C)*

However when it came to telling their parents themselves about being bullied, there were markedly different views expressed by students in the different groups about if, and when, parents should be told.

Students telling parents:

The majority of students acknowledged they should tell their parents if they are bullied, but many also expressed reservations about doing so. While some students said they would tell their parents '*immediately*', others suggested they would only tell them '*after they had dealt with it*', or '*when it got serious*', or when they couldn't handle it themselves.

It was principally Year 9 students who expressed reservations about telling parents, however a few Year 6 girls also said they might not want to talk to their parents in the first instance. They spoke about talking to someone else first.

The reasons which students gave for not telling parents had similarities to why they don't tell teachers. Primarily the reason given was '*parents just interfere and make it worse*'. Other reasons related to '*being embarrassed*' or perceiving it as '*not their business*'. The notion that it was not their parents' business was expressed by several Year 9 students and may reflect their growing sense of autonomy.

Parents will make it worse.

- *because your parents normally don't do the right thing by you. --- Like they don't understand its a big deal ---- because they don't understand where we're coming from and they just go and tell someone and then that can make it worse. They'll take it right to the kids that do it ---- And then make it worse.----- Or talk to their parents. Yeah. "You can do it. Make friends with the person now" How? They, like, hate you! (Year 9 girls, school C)*
- *when we get bullied, like, physical and like, at school, verbal. I know, parents are like, "Yeah, you should tell us everything that's going on," and so – but you don't want to because --- and you don't want your parents interfering. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *I think kids don't tell their parents because – they want to tell their parents but they don't want their parents to call up the school. (Year 9 girls, school B)*

It's embarrassing.

- *Actually I wouldn't tell parents but I know you should – because I'd feel embarrassed about it. Personally it may be too embarrassing to tell parents. I think that's why a lot of victims don't tell their parents and they don't want to get into trouble. (Yr 6 girl, school E)*

It's not their business.

- *Like, little kids, they will always tell their parents, because their parents are like .. Gods ... and will protect them ...but whereas you get to, like, our age and you get bullied, you don't really want to tell them, because it's your life, you want to keep it personal to you.*
- *Yeah, and it's your domain. It's like, your parents – at this age, your parents are just there, like, push them aside a bit. They're just over in the corner, they just keep feeding us each night like we love them, we tell them we love them, which you do. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- *...didn't tell parents 'cause it's really none of their business. Only tell them if it's something you can't deal with. (Year 9 girl, school B)*

(vi) consequences for the bully

Students across all groups said there should be consequences for anyone who bullies. The strong majority view was that consequences must be **immediate** and **meaningful**.

- ***Immediate punishment**, if you go to a teacher – it should always be followed up the day that you tell them not storing it up for later. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- *its got to be ... **proper actions** and they actually feel bad so they' don't do it again. (Year 9 girl, school A)*

Warnings were dismissed as ineffectual. If there is a warning, the view was it should be one only:

- *One warning. One warning, that's it. And that will influence them to stop fighting. (Year 9 boy school B)*

When asked what the consequences should be, students principally spoke about **disciplinary measures** such as writing out lines, detentions, internal and external suspensions, community service and exclusion – even though students also expressed a view that these measures don't often work:

- *I've had people who I've told on and they've got community service. They've filled the bag [with rubbish] and then come and dumped it on my head. It's not gonna work. (Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *A lot of time when you do out of school suspensions ..they just stay at home playing X box or something depending on the parent.... some parents don't give a damn... They don't really get anything out of it. They think of it as a holiday. (Year 9 boy, school C)*

The notion that an external suspension was just another holiday for some students was repeated in several groups.

- *I don't want to be rude but some parents don't really give a s**** and then they go home a for like five or six days and their parents don't do anything. So its just another holiday. They get to do whatever they want and don't pay for what they've done. It just doesn't sink in. (Year 9 girl, school B)*

Students, especially Year 9s, generally indicated that lunchtime and afternoon detentions, and internal suspensions were the disciplinary approaches which can have greater affect:

- *If they get suspended they should not go home but be at the office for all of class time. Do work at the office. Hard work. (Year 9 girl, school B)*
- *After school suspension that kills people, their special times --- and get heaps of work and things. (Year 9 girl, school B)*
- *If they weren't allowed in the school grounds at lunchtime then they would finally figure out that they shouldn't do it anymore otherwise they'll just be in the principal's office all day. (Year 6 boy, school E)*
- *This sounds really antisocial of me but it's really the friend group that's motivating them to bully cause if they don't have their friends they've got no other reason to do it – they've got no power – so if you can actually manage to cut them off from their friends as a punishment – like keep them at the office 3 lunchtimes a week would make them lose the influence from their friends, cause once they lose that influence ... you're gonna find that it happens less. (Year 9 boy, school C)*

Interestingly, when asked what was the best thing their school had done to combat bullying, some Year 9 girls (school B) said 'a return to suspensions', and some year 9 boys (school C) said 'some of the internal suspensions'.

There were different views about exclusion, with some students suggesting it should only be for very serious incidents, while a minority of students suggested otherwise.

In the main, students indicated the consequences should be dependant on the frequency and severity of the bullying, but all bullying should incur a consequence.

Knowing what the consequences will be was also cited as important. Year 6 students from school D explained how bullying was addressed as part of their school's positive behaviour plan with a rewards system based on behaviour keys ABCDE. They know clearly what the consequences will be:

- *you get one key if your behaviour is rated A, B or C. If you go to a D or E you have your key taken off you and don't get to participate in fun day. At the end of each term, [kids] do a key level – a piece of paper with all the rules you have to follow and you mark yourself. Then the teacher marks you – so you have a bit of a say in it as well. You get a D or E for not following the 5 [principles]; for getting into trouble a lot – like a mark for your behaviour. ----- And there's a reward at the end of the term and if you're an A, B or C you can go to the rewards day and we do all sorts of activities. And if you're a D or an E you have to go to work. So it kind of encourages people to want to do it. It encourages them to work to the best of their ability. (Year 6 students, school D)*

Several groups suggested a possible consequence for the bully could be to 'make them apologise.' In addition to incurring a consequence, there was a general view among students that that someone should talk to the bully about why they are bullying and explain the impact of their behaviour. (See next section).

(vii) helping those involved

Help for the bully: When students were asked what sort of help might change the bully's behaviour, common responses were counselling, anger management, private conversations with the principal, a letter of apology to the person they have bullied, and talking with the person they had bullied:

- *Talk to principal about it and why they are doing it. Have conversations – it might be a family problem.---- They should just have one on one meetings because he might not want to talk about it in the presence of his parents. ----- It could be difficult for the bully, they might be bullied – or family problems – so the bully should have someone to talk to, to tell them everything and then help them because it might be really hard for the bully and talk about other ways to behave What to do, what not to do, so a little help. (Year 6 girls, school E)*
- *And there should be some form of anger management or something, some form of counselling to find out why they're bullying to help them stop. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- *Even they could get counselling because if they have got bad things going on at home, they could get counseling for that then they might stop bullying. Yes if they get counselled for that then their issues will be sorted out so they'll stop giving us issues. (Year 9 girls, school B)*
- *Maybe if it's a small thing the teacher could have a small meeting with the bully and person being bullied to just talking it through – if they don't realise they're bullying.*

Many students were cautious about getting the parties involved to talk issues through, fearing it would only make matters worse. However, some Year 9 students (school B) suggested the success of this approach can depend on how the meeting is facilitated:

- *Maybe sit down with the person they've been bullying. See what they've done to them. And sort it out. I reckon that is one thing you should be able to tell the principal. Like get them to organise a meeting. Like just them two (victim and bully) in a room by themselves and get them to sort out their problems. Without teachers butting in. But – so they can just, sort of, like, "What have I done to make you do this?" or whatever. Yes, like, especially if they are just bullying you and you have got no idea what you've done wrong.*

Facilitator: You are saying that the teacher shouldn't be in that sort of meeting?

- *No, because – I'm not being mean, but they just butt in and tell you what to say and stuff. Yes. And it's like - - - So you can't really get it out when they're in there.*
- *Sometimes when, like, you're in the office and you're like, talking, like, to the bully or whatever – like, or you're the bully and you're talking to the witness or something, you want to, like, say, "I bullied you because you're swearing and calling me and – like, swear words," like, you know. You want to swear, but then, like you can't.*
- *Like, if we were in the office with Mr Principal you'd be talking it out, and then he's like, "Well, why would you do that? Why did you do this?" Like, they just butt in. Because, like, just to cut it down, we can't really say what we want to say to the student because, like, the teachers are there and stuff. But we don't want to say it because they're in there.*

Is there anyone that you would feel you would trust or be comfortable enough sitting in there?

- *The guidance officer. I reckon the guidance officer would be good, because you could just say, like, "Can you just be quiet for a second, and then let us talk?" And then he can come back in. Or, like, they could just sit to the side and then just say, "Can you be quiet for a minute?" and then talk, and then they can talk.*

There was a strong view across the groups that it would be helpful to **make 'the bully' aware** of how their words or actions can affect the other person. Typical comments included:

- *Get someone who has been bullied and something really bad has happened to them – get them to come and speak to them to show that this is what happens to people so don't do it. (Year 9 girls, school A)*
- *And you think about how it feel to be bullied. Think about it from the bully's perspective. Then if you come from the victim's point of view it sort of changes the whole factor of the way you think about it, you know what I mean.(Year 9 boy, school C)*
- *Show them how much they are affecting people's lives because most people are kidding about it but it does effect them. (Year 9 girl, school C)*

It is worth noting at this point the comments of the Year 9 boy who identified as having bullied 'everyone at state school' He described the **impact bullying can have on the bully**:

- *I used to bully everyone at state school. And bullying does affect people though. And it does affect the bullies – the bullies life too – if I get a education, might get expelled from school, you know, and stay at home. That's the sort of thing I didn't want to do. I didn't want to be staying home all the time. I used to bully people a lot. So I just, you know, stopped bullying, and I just looked forward to my education. It affected other people by – it was me.*

Help for students who are bullied: Students consistently said that kids who are bullied need reassurance and support, time out, to have friends and be encouraged to move on. There was also a view that they need help to become more confident about how to stand up to the bullies. Typical comments were:

- **reassurance and support**

- *They need some real support from, not only their friends but families as well ..to get back to that place.. because when you're down here, like in a hole, and you've dug yourself a little shelter .. and you're just trying to get out of it – that's when your parents need to help you climb out of it. That's when your friends come in and they support you. (Year 9 boy, school C)*

- **to have friends**

- *If bystanders know they are being bullied, they should ..comfort them and be their friend so they don't feel like they are as weak as the bully. --- Other students [to] play with them so they're not as lonely and they've got protection from the bully – and the bully doesn't get what he wants because there's lots of witnesses. (Year 6 students, school D)*

- *Security. Feeling they belong. And close friends as well, because if you have close friends they support you and help you along. And if you know the person who is being bullied is good at something get them to do that thing so they feel pretty good. They feel more confident when they're doing it like everyday stuff. (Year 9 girls, school A)*
- *when you have friends around you can just ignore it and say "Oh don't worry about it." [But] if you've already been bullied to the point where you've lost all your friends, then its harder to ignore because its such a major issue. (Year 9 girls, school C)*
- **time out**
 - *Personal time with someone to express their feelings so they don't keep it bottled up inside and they feel really bad. (Year 6 student, school D)*
 - *a free period for you and your friends to recoup and [discuss] what just happened. – they take you away for half an hour, away from that environment. They talk to you. (Year 9 boys, school C)*
- **encouraged to "move on"**
 - *Encourage the student to leave it behind them and move on. Not easy to do – normally if there was a physical thing, its hard to get out of your memory. cause it's a ... nightmare and it stays with you. (Year 6 student, school D)*
- **counselling**
 - *I got bullied for being really, really, really antisocial last year but that was in the weeks afterand I really was about to hit someone and then I went and saw the counsellor, talked to him about it, and it just went away. It gets your emotions out. (Yr 9 boy, school C)*
- **confidence building**
 - *They need personality building. They need things to establish who they are and just how they can stop this. Like how to say no, that's not right. --- confidence in not letting the bully get to them. (Year 9 girl, school A)*
 - *Students don't feel comfortable because normally a lot of the time teachers just say "Oh you have to speak to the bully rad-di-rah-rah". Sometimes the students don't feel comfortable about actually confronting the bully. It needs to be like a gradual introduction – reintroduction. (Year 9 boy, school C)*

(viii) the best thing their school has done to combat bullying

The 'things' which students nominated as the best thing their school had done to combat bullying are described below 'in their own words'. They highlight the importance students place on (i) strengthening their knowledge about bullying and developing the skills to deal with it (ii) being in agreement with how the school deals with those involved when bullying occurs and (iii) having someone they can talk to.

School E: Metropolitan primary school.

Boys:

- **Just saying bullying won't be tolerated.**
- **And the anti-bullying program** – it's a new thing: There's bully bulldozer, icy isolation – that's someone who does own thing, roving random and crazy conflict.

Girls:

- **We have these character charts.** And there is four different types of bullying and every week the grade 7s do a role play on a each of the types of bullying and when year 7s come in to do an example and each character – there is one a week – the teachers explain it to the classes. There's icy isolation, roving random and bully bulldozer. They make the names seem fun so the younger kids are a bit more encouraging and start to look at it, because of the pictures and names. And that chart – it kind of tells you what isn't bullying so you ignore what isn't bullying – like there is one thing on bullying and then there are other things that may seem like bullying but actually aren't because they don't continue
- Probably that they **sort [it] out as soon as possible** so it gets stopped at the earliest moment and they don't let it go on and so it won't happen again. Some people in my class have been bullied badly and the teachers and principal have taken care of it really fast, and its anonymously and discreetly. And I think one of the best things our school has done is, if you're bullied, it usually goes straight to the principal, there is no stuffing around with teachers that, you just get like a warning or something. You go straight to the principal every time Just to add to that our principal is pretty strict and she can deal with any really serious bullying and people come out like nothing happened, because they know" Oh if I bully ..I'm going to end up back in there again (and all agreed) 'and you don't want that to happen again'

School D: Rural primary school. Mixed gender group.

- **Our behaviour plan**, called the [Name of School] Five and we've been shown **videos** of what happens when people get bullied and lots of bullies stopped after that.

[The plan] is 'based on five keys: (1) Be safe (2) participate and work hard (3) show respect (4) get organised, and (5) bounce back. Show respect is probably the main one we focus on because its with bullying and to other classmates and teachers and stuff.
- **Bounce back** – that one has something to do with bullying like --- When you get bullied or you break one of those rules, you don't go on crying, or giving dirty looks ---You like bounce back and don't worry about it. ---- Or if you fail a test. ----You don't spread rumours about someone just because they're being mean. You be positive about it. --- You just forget about it and say "that's okay I wont do it next time".
- And there's a reward at the end of the term and if you're an A, B or C you can go to the rewards day and we do all sorts of activities. And if you're a D or an E you have to go to work. So it kind of encourages people to want to do it. It encourages them to work to the best of their ability.

School C: Metropolitan Catholic co-educational school

Boys:

- **We had a play** recently that was really good It's "fight flight flow" – and basically that taught us about bullying and what it does and it just helps people to realise what can happen. Cause it actually stops a lot of the bullies – it makes them realise....I think we need to get explained situations that are relevant to us.
- **Some of the punishments** – like internal suspensions.
- **Guidance counsellors** – speak to someone --- Even if like, telling speaking your feelings to someone .. if you know they're not going to spread it ...sometimes telling somebody makes you feel a whole lot better.

Girls:

- In year 7 a counsellor came **to talk to whole class**
- we had people come in who **act out scenarios** and how to manage them
- **the counsellors** are good at this school

School B: Regional state high school

Boys:

- **coloured paper hands** and they [students] cut it out and wrote on it. We had a bit of description and stuff on it about 'stop bullying' and that, you know and then we stuck it up against the wall. Joined the hands up around the school.--- I wrote "Stop bullying It ruins your life" --- I wrote: "It will stop your learning if you keep bullying".--- It was good cause learned other people's ideas.
- We had a **bullying week** and teachers talked about it in the break.
- Last year in grade 8 we had actresses come from Sydney and they cam to talk to us about bullying and did **acting about bullying**. Its happening again today. --- This afternoon. Its just like a play. In the theatre. They come from Sydney.--- Just for 8s and 9s.--- Called Brainstorm. --- They act out different scenes of bullying scenes and also how to respond. And they just ask questions and stuff. **Facilitator: That acting out, is that a helpful way of learning what to do?**
- Yes. Yes. Its kind of cool too. We had an actress about - had her acting about, like, people that are in rumours and that stuff didn't of the rumours and how he ad-libs it, you know -he ad-libs it that that's worse then going up to another person and ask them. And that was true, you know, about the rumours, you know.

Girls:

- **Return to suspension** and **regularly tell us** the policy
- I don't really know because I don't do that bullying stuff. I don't see bullying at school. I don't get involved so I wouldn't really know.

School A: Regional independent all-girls school

- *I seriously reckon its things like [School Name] Against Bullying - It sounds fun **and you want to get involved** in it.*
- *An even though it might not be directly aimed to stop bullying, I like the **activity days** and school camps we have because it **gets people to bond** with each other so you learn so much more about each other – different things and you learn why they [some students] might be different.*
- *I think **having people to talk to** – there is always someone you can talk to. Yeah pastoral care groups and like, a teacher you can talk to that you are close to that you can talk to and you're not scared to talk to them.*

3. Consulting with students

What the toolkit says

Element 7 of the Toolkit recommends schools consult students regularly to monitor and determine the types of bullying behaviour and assist in the development of appropriate school based approaches.

The *Toolkit suggests* –

- it is important to listen to students, encourage their participation and seriously consider their views when developing, implementing and monitoring school based approaches
- suggests schools need to build skills in gathering information and data on students' views and experiences of students to enable the school to understand the patterns of bullying occurring and to involve students in developing tailored responses
- when engaging students, schools need to develop strategies that demonstrate respect for views, honest debate within safe boundaries, engage marginalised students as well as those who often have a voice, and use mediums students are comfortable with
- ways of engaging students in discussion can include focus groups and small group discussion, interactive websites and other social media art, posters, drama DVDs and interactive activities and within the curriculum.

What the students said

The views of the students who participated in this consultation highlight the benefit of consulting with students and their desire to be consulted. Their views are a strong endorsement of element 7 of the toolkit and their ideas about ways of being engaged 'flesh out' some of the methods and mediums which can be used.

Focus group evaluation findings:

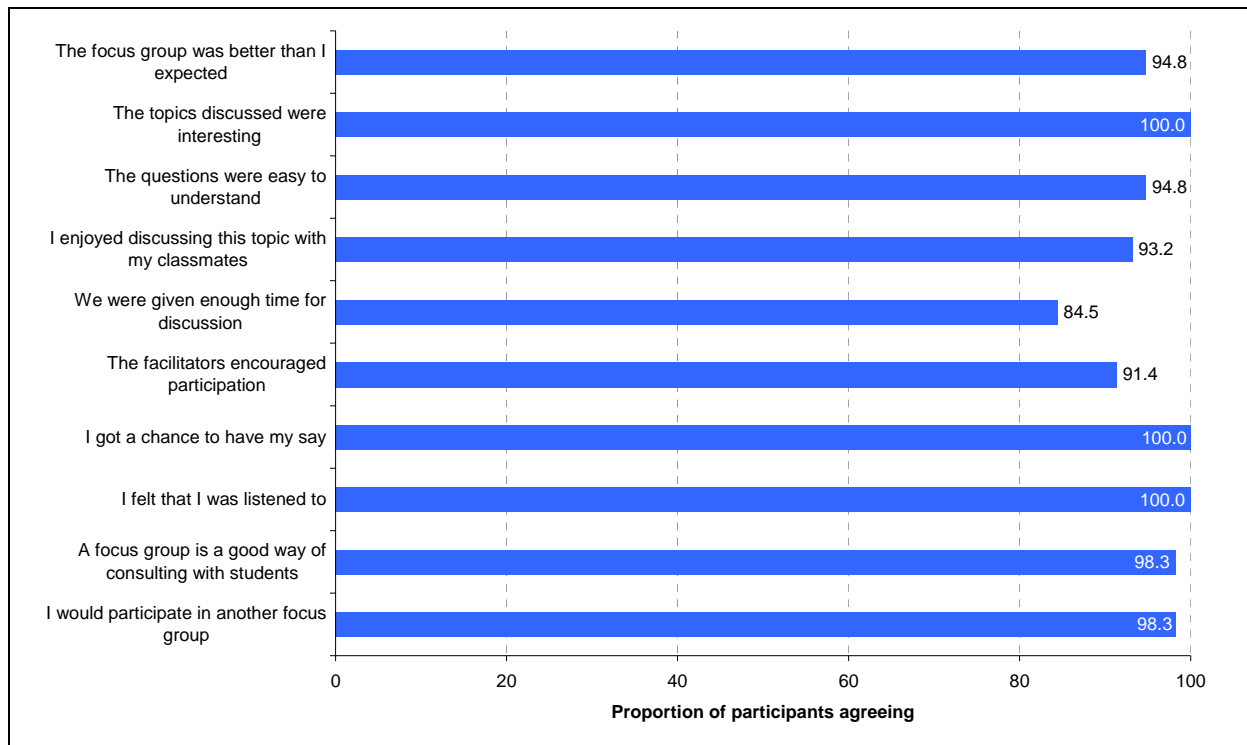
The Commission's consultation demonstrates the use of focus group discussion as a method of engaging with students. While it is not a method that will suit all students, its value is evidenced by the depth and breadth of the views elicited during discussion as well as the students' very positive written feedback about the focus group process.

Fifty-eight of the 63 students completed a Focus Group Evaluation Form. Their feedback was very positive as illustrated on the graph below (see over page). All students reported they found the topics interesting; got a chance to have their say; and felt listened to. The vast majority also indicated that a focus group is a good way of consulting with students and they would participate in another group. Written comments about the value of the group and/or the facilitators included:

- *I think this group was great and I learned a lot.*
- *I liked everything because I get to know a lot about bullying.*
- *There should be more of these groups*
- *I liked the focus group. It was good to discuss this issue with a wide range of students*
- *I really liked the facilitators. They were friendly and understanding. I felt understood and safe. The questions were easy and I am really glad I came.*

- *I thought it was really great and before this I felt really nervous, but during it I felt a lot more comfortable, I didn't really like when everyone was silent and no one knew what to say.*
- *The group was great. Everyone was very encouraging and I felt comfortable about speaking about anything with them.*
- *I liked it a lot especially the facilitators and the break. I also enjoyed getting everyone's thoughts.*
- *I liked how you were given time to speak and weren't hurried and/or rushed to finished speaking.*

Participants' evaluation of the focus groups:



Several students made suggestions about things the group should have discussed but didn't. Suggestions were:

- *Probably a little more about cyber bullying*
- *Yes the safety of kids on the internet like face book or twitter.*
- *How often does the bullying actually occur*
- *I think that children with disabilities and differences should be discussed*
- *more opportunity for us to just talk*
- *I think maybe deep discussion with verbal bullying*
- *more about our school*
- *discussing the current plans we have*
- *We should have discussed what bullying isn't more*
- *At the end when other kids have left we could talk about our own problems*
- *Maybe if you or another person had a bullying experience (anonymously) and how our school resolved that.*

Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

The consultation tested three elements of QSAAV's *Working Together* toolkit. The findings suggest a strong correlation between the students' views and the best practice evidence presented in the toolkit. The students' views also had relevance to other elements in the toolkit. Importantly, the findings identify some strong themes and common issues from the students' perspective which may be relevant to the wider student population.

Establishing a definition.

The findings suggest that students perceive there are positive advantages in having a clear definition of bullying. By helping students to differentiate between different hurtful behaviours, a definition can help them to decide how to respond and how they view themselves. However, the findings also indicate that behaviours which do not meet the bullying threshold should not be trivialised and need to be dealt with appropriately so situations do not escalate.

An associated definitional issue is the language used to define students' roles in bullying situations. The findings indicate that from the student's perspective, terms such as victim and bully can be highly emotive and can become labels that stigmatise both parties. Furthermore, the roles can be interchangeable.

The findings support the toolkit's recommendation that schools develop local definitions that are consistent with the views of the school community. It was clear in this consultation that opinions differed between the school groups about the defining elements of bullying and the types of bullying discussed. Significantly, students consider they are best placed to identify which types of bullying their school should address first.

There were also differences in how students rated bullying as a problem with most students rating it a bigger problem for kids generally than they did for themselves personally. This finding could arguably suggest that caution be exercised when raising students' awareness about bullying and its potential for harm, so students do not become over-anxious or hyper-vigilant about it.

Developing and communicating the policy.

The findings support the collaborative development of a school's anti-bullying policy and provide overwhelming evidence that students see themselves as key stakeholders who should be involved. The students' commentary suggests that their knowledge, perspectives and input is crucial to the development of a successful school policy. There was a strong view that all students should have the opportunity to be involved. This would require multiple methods of engagement.

While the focus of student discussion was bullying, the conversations frequently linked with behaviour codes more generally. This was most evident in the conversations with Year 6 students from school D who continually referred back to their school's behaviour plan. Moreover, the values and behaviours that students said anti-bullying policies should encourage – respect, inclusiveness and acceptance of

differences – correspond with the toolkit’s emphasis on the creation of a positive school culture as the foundation stone for taking action against bullying.

The consultation findings support the need to communicate the school’s anti-bullying policy so everyone in the school community is on same page – teachers, parents and students. Once again, students indicated they want to have a say in the communication methods used. They suggested students should play an active part in delivering the anti-bullying message to each other in creative ways. Notably, students spoke of the benefits of using mediums such as drama to safely demonstrate and explore bullying scenarios and solutions. This finding is in keeping with messages in the toolkit’s section on teaching and learning programs.

Procedural steps.

Reporting – The findings suggest that students often make a distinction between telling someone about being bullied and reporting it. Students in this consultation stressed the value of having access to someone who will listen to their concerns and validate their feelings without interfering. They suggested this can sometimes be enough to enable them to deal with the bullying themselves. This finding has implications for teachers and parents whose first reaction may be to actively intervene to fix the problem.

Further themes which emerged reveal that ‘trust’ determines who students will tell or report to about bullying incidents, and embarrassment is the feeling most associated with disclosure. These findings highlight the need for both teachers and parents to build trusting relationships with students and to find ways of deflecting the negative self views that underlie their embarrassment. The comments of students in this consultation revealed a positive correlation between having a trusting relationship with a teacher and their level of comfort about reporting.

Teachers – The findings contain other strong messages for teachers. In particular, students want to be able to report to teachers confidentially and have their report dealt with immediately and discretely without incurring retribution or further embarrassment. The tension between keeping the student’s disclosure confidential while taking action to address the problem highlights how sensitively teachers must tread at times. It also demonstrates the need for schools to build confidence within the student body that disclosure is beneficial. This requires students to see evidence of positive outcomes and for teachers to revisit with students to see if their situation has improved.

Parents – The findings confirm that students are apprehensive about telling parents they are bullied, particularly as they get older. A major concern is that parents can unintentionally make their situation worse. This finding underscores the need for awareness raising among parents about bullying and appropriate responses (demonstrating the value of products like the *Working Together* toolkit for parents). The students’ views also demonstrate the value of documenting the parent’s roles and responsibilities and reporting processes in the school’s anti-bullying policy and ensuring the policy is communicated to them.

Interventions – The findings confirm that students want those who bully others to be held to account for the hurt they cause. The students expressed strong views about the need for meaningful and immediate consequences for those who bully. However, they recognised the limitations of traditional disciplinary measures and identified which ones they considered more effective. Their views,

particularly about the value of internal suspensions as opposed to external suspensions, may have implications for school behaviour management plans.

While the findings support the retention of disciplinary measures, they also demonstrate that students see value in having non-punitive measures in place to help those who bully others to understand and address the impacts of their behaviour. The findings also stress the importance of having systems of formal and informal support in place for the student who is bullied. Underpinning much of the discussion about support was the need for students to build skills and relationships which will help them to deal more effectively with conflict, whether it be bullying or other behaviours which can be just as hurtful.

Recommendations

In light of the consultation findings, the Commission recommends that:

1. Queensland schools give all students the opportunity to be involved when developing, implementing and monitoring school-based anti-bullying policy and strategies at the local level.
2. The student consultation report be made available to Queensland schools to complement the *Working Together* products and to demonstrate the insights and ideas to be gained by involving students.
3. The *Working Together* section on the professional development of teachers include references to the insights of students. In addition, development topics should include:
 - the recognition and management of latent and emerging behaviours which do not fully manifest as bullying, and
 - exploration of the tensions between a student's sensitivity about disclosure, their desire for confidentiality and the need to take action to address the problem.
4. The insights of students be included in products developed by the sectors to inform parents about bullying and how to respond to bullying concerns which arise at school.
5. Queensland schools create opportunities for students to safely recognise, explore and practice responses to bullying. Opportunities should include the use of drama to demonstrate relevant scenarios and solutions accompanied by discussion with teachers and peers.
6. Schools collect local data and information from students to assist in the development of tailored school-based approaches to bullying and enable the school to internally evaluate the effectiveness of those approaches over time.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Focus questions

Appendix 2. Focus Group Discussion Guide

Appendix 3. Consent Form

Appendix 4. Information Sheet for parents and students

Appendix 5. Evaluation Form

Appendix 6. Overview of recent bullying and violence research and engagement activities involving students

Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence – Focus Group Questions

Introductory statement: Our questions are broadly divided into three sections – the first set of question are to do with bullying in general, the second set is about actions that people might take and the third section, is about consulting with people about a school bullying policy.

1. Questions to whole of group: (About nature of bullying and defining it) Allow 20 minutes

Introductory statement: Bullying has received a lot of media attention lately.

Q	Primary questions	Secondary questions
1	What do you think bullying is?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What's the difference between 'just joking around' and bullying? ○ In your view, is it bullying if a person says or does something hurtful to someone just once?
2	What forms of bullying are you aware of?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you think any forms are worse than others? ○ Is bullying different for boys and girls? ○ What can you tell us about cyber bullying?
3a	<i>On this slip of paper please record:</i> How much of a problem do you think bullying is for kids in general?If you had to rate it on a scale from 1 to 10.....	<p>...where 1 means no problem and 10 means it a huge problem, what score would you give?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why do you think this? (<i>Your responses will not be shared with the group</i>)
3b	<i>On the second slip of paper record:</i> How much of a concern is bullying for you personally.? If you had to rate it on a scale from 1 to 10.....	<p>.... where 1 means no problem and 10 means it a huge problem, what score would you give?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ And why have you given this rating? (<i>Your responses will not be shared with the group</i>)
4a	Why do you think some kids are bullied?	
4b	What about the kids who sometimes bully others – what are they like?	
4c	Why do some kids join in or watch?	

2. Break into 2 groups – Questions for break-out session: (About responsive actions) Allow 25 minutes.

Introductory statement: If every school wanted to have a policy to manage bullying, imagine what would they need to think about and what actions everyone might agree to take when bullying occurs.

Q	Primary questions	Secondary questions
5	If you had your way, what would the plan say kids should do if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) they are bullied or (b) see someone else being bullied? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What could kids say or do at the time to make the bullying stop? ○ If the bullying doesn't stop, what do you think the victim or people watching should do? ○ If they chose to tell someone, who'd be the best person to tell?
6	What would make you comfortable about reporting that you or someone else was being bullied?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why do you think some kids don't report it? ○ What methods might encourage kids to report? ○ What about parents – do you think they should be told? If so, when?
7	In your opinion, what should the school plan say about how to deal with kids when they bully others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What would you consider if you were deciding what the consequences should be? ○ What sort of help do you think might change a person's bullying behaviour? ○ What do you think should happen if the bullying is reported but doesn't stop?
8	What about the kids who are bullied - what help do you think they need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who do you think should give them this help?
9	What values and behaviours should the policy encourage among the whole school community?	

Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence – Focus Group Questions

Break for 5 – 10 minutes for drink/snack/stretch. During break, post the break-out session Qs and As on the wall.

Reconvene group. Ask students to read the recorded comments from the two groups. Any questions to be directed to students in the respective groups.

3. Questions for whole group: (About consulting on / communicating policy). Allow 15-20 minutes.

Introductory statement: *Thank you for all your ideas and opinions so far. Lets' now think about how a school would go about writing a school policy and putting it in place so it works.*

Q	Primary question	Secondary questions
10	Who do you think should be involved in deciding what the policy says?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anyone else in / outside the school community?
11	What would be the best way of involving students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you think most students want to have a say? ○ What if students weren't involved, how well do you think the policy would work?
12	How would everyone know about the policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are some ways of making sure everyone understands it? ○ How often do you think everyone would need to be reminded about what the policy says?

4. Closing questions: Allow 5 minutes.

Q	Primary question	Wrap up question
13	Name the best thing you think your school has done to help put a stop to bullying?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there anything anyone wants to add before we finish up?

Probing statements:

- Would you explain further?
- Can you give me an example of what you mean?
- What do you mean when you say..?
- How did you handle that?
- Does anyone see it differently?
- Lets do a go-around...
- What do you think (name)..?

5. Close and Evaluation

Refer to Discussion Guide. Lead facilitator to give closing comments and ask students to complete evaluation forms.

Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence – FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Welcome and introductions

Good morning and thanks for coming to talk with us about bullying in schools. My name is and these are my co-workers. We work for the Children's Commission – which promotes and protects the rights of Queensland kids. (School staff member) is going to sit in case you want to talk about our discussion after we've gone.

Check OK about taping and being here

(Commission officer) will take notes but we're also going to record the discussion so no ideas get missed. Can I just make sure that everyone's OK about that? Also, is everyone here because they want to be? If you've changed your mind it's okay to say so. OK, I'm now going to tell you a little bit about why we're here and what you can expect .

Purpose of group

We're here because a group called the *Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence* has been set up to advise government on how tackle bullying and violence in schools. The Alliance is made up of representatives from State, Independent and Catholic schools and the Children's Commissioner. The Alliance has been talking to teachers, parents, principals and researchers. They've asked the Commission to talk with the real experts – students – to find out what you think. We're having discussions with students at several schools in Queensland.

What we'll do with the information

We'll put all the ideas we get from students together in a report to share with the Alliance. Your ideas will be used to help other schools in Queensland become safer places.

Who'll do most of the talking

Our focus group discussion should last about an hour and a half and we'll have a break halfway. Once we get started we'll ask you questions and we'd like you to share your ideas / opinions. We'll leave it up to you to do most of the talking and we will do a lot of listening. We won't be giving our opinions. Remember we want to learn from you.

Agreement about confidentiality

During discussion try not to use people's real names if you use a story to explain your ideas. Although we'll keep personal information private, we can't promise that everyone will. If friends ask you about the group later so we'd like you to follow a 'no gossip agreement'. This means you can talk about the Qs and your answers, but not other people or what they say.

If uncomfortable

Please tell us if the discussion makes you feel uncomfortable at any time, or if you want to say something but don't want it to be recorded. If something personal comes up you'd like to talk about, please one of us in the break or later.

Exception to confidentiality agreement

We'll keep personal information confidential, except if you tell us something that leads us to believe someone is in need of protection – for example, if someone says they are thinking of hurting themselves or someone else, or they are being hurt or abused. In these cases, the law says we have to pass the information on so the person gets help.

How the group will run

We'll ask one question at a time and wait for everyone to have a chance to answer. Please be respectful of each other's opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. It's okay to have a different opinion. Don't feel like you have to talk directly to us. Feel free to talk to each other. you can reply to something someone's said. We might ask people by name if they want to speak – just so we can be sure everyone gets a say.

So let's just go over these points again.

- Try not to use the real names of people if you use a story to explain your ideas
- Try not to gossip after the group
- Let everyone have a chance to speak and be respectful.

Does anyone have any questions about why we are here or add any other points to our agreement or how the group should be run? Before we begin with the first question –we'll go round the group and can everyone say their name.

REFER TO FOCUS QUESTIONS and commence discussion

CLOSING

Brief oral summary (by facilitator or note taker)

— Is this an adequate summary? Have we missed anything?

Thank you

— for your time and for sharing your ideas with us today.

— for being so considerate and respectful of one another.

Please remember the 'no gossip agreement'

— and that you can talk with (school staff member) if something said in the group bothers you.

So what happens next?

After we've spoken to all the schools taking part we'll put everyone's ideas together. We'll look at the similar / different ideas and put these in a report to the Alliance. We'll then let you know the results and how the Alliance will use your opinions and ideas. I'm sure your combined views will be really helpful to other schools in Queensland when they consult with their students.

Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence *Consultation with students about bullying*

Discussion Group Consent Form

Student's consent (Please tick the box if you agree with the sentence beside it)

- I want to take part in the Discussion Group with the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian* to talk about bullying in schools.
- I agree to the Discussion being taped so the Commission can check what is said.
- I agree to the Commission reporting on my ideas as long as I am identified by my age and gender (boy / girl) only.

Student's name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____ **Age:** _____

Parental consent

I/We (insert name of parent/guardian) _____

give my/our consent for (insert name of student) _____

to participate in the consultation process being undertaken by the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian* on behalf of the *Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence*.

- I/We have read the Information Sheet provided and understand the purpose of the student consultation and what it will involve for students who take part.
- I/We agree to the Discussion Group being audio-taped so the Commission can check for accuracy when writing its report on the consultation.
- I/We agree to my child's comments being used in any report the Commission writes, provided the only identifiers used are their age and gender.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Privacy statement: The Commission is gathering students' opinions and ideas about the discussion topic on behalf of the *Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence* for use in a report on engaging with students about bullying in schools. Personal information will be managed in accordance with the *Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld)* and will not be given to any other person or agency unless you consent or we are required to do so by law.

Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence

CONSULTATION WITH STUDENTS ABOUT BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

Students in Year 6 and Year 9 from several Queensland schools are being invited to give their views about bullying in schools. The student consultation is being conducted by the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian* on behalf of the *Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence*. The purpose of this Information Sheet is to tell parents and students about the consultation and what it involves.

About the Alliance

The *Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence* is a group of people from State, Independent and Catholic education and parent, teacher and principal organisations. The Alliance is working with the State government to tackle bullying and violence in schools. The aim is to make schools a safer place for students to learn and teachers to teach.

About the Commission

The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian is also a member of the Alliance. It is the Commission's job to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and their right to have a say in decisions that affect them. This is why the Commission is leading the consultation with students. The Commission will talk to a sample of students, gather all their ideas together, and report to the Alliance.

How consulting will help

The Alliance will use the students' views to improve the information and resources being provided to Queensland schools to tackle bullying. In time, the Alliance wants every school to consult with its own students about how bullying is handled in their school.

What sort of consultation is it

The Commission is holding focus group discussions with Year 6 and Year 9 students from different schools. There will be no more than 8 students in a group. Some groups will be all girls or boys and some will be mixed. Students can choose to take part or not.

What will students have to do

Staff from the Commission will ask students in the group some general questions about bullying and what schools can do about it. Each student is encouraged to give their own opinion or ideas. Students will not be asked to share personal stories. The group will meet at school during class time and take about 90 minutes (including a refreshment break).

Is permission required

Yes. The attached consent form must be signed by the student and their parent /guardian and returned to the school if a student wants to take part. If a large number of students are interested, the school will choose which students actually participate.

School support for students

A school staff member will sit in on the group discussion. Staff will also be available afterwards if a student wants to talk with them about something that has come up during the group discussion.

Recording what students say

A person from the Commission will write down what is said in the group. The discussion will also be audio-taped so the Commission can check that no one's ideas are missed. The tape will be destroyed once the Commission has written its report.

Privacy and confidentiality

The Commission will keep all personal student information confidential⁵. Names of students will not be used in any reports the Commission writes. If a student is quoted in a report, the report will only say if the student is a boy or a girl and how old they are.

What happens after the group

Students who take part in the groups will be asked to follow a 'no gossip rule'. This means they can talk with their teachers, parents or classmates about the questions and their own answers, but not about other people.

Will students be told the results

After all the schools have been consulted, the Commission will tell students and parents about the results and how the Alliance will use students' opinions and ideas.

⁵ The only limit to confidentiality is if information is shared that indicates someone is at significant risk of harm. In this case the Commission and school staff present have a legal obligation to pass the information on to the relevant authority/authorities (eg. the Police, Department of Communities).

Focus Group Evaluation Form

Your feedback will help us to plan for the next focus group.



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

School: _____

Year level: _____

Male Female

Beside each of the following statements, please place a tick in the appropriate box.	Yes	No	Not Sure
The focus group was better than I expected			
The topics discussed were interesting			
The questions were easy to understand			
I enjoyed discussing this topic with my classmates			
We were given enough time for discussion			
The facilitators encouraged participation			
I got a chance to have my say			
I felt that I was listened to			
A focus group is a good way of consulting with students			
I would participate in another focus group			

Please tick the response you agree with:

Overall, the focus group was.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Great	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> OK	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor
The facilitators were.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Great	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> OK	<input type="checkbox"/> Boring

Was there something you think we should have discussed but didn't?

Any other comments? (eg what you liked or didn't like; how the group could be improved)

Thank you.



This document was prepared for the Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence.

Overview of recent research and engagement activities involving students

1. Bullying and violence – state and national engagement activities:

Activity	Youth Violence Forum – Queensland
	Held in Brisbane - July, 2007
Organised by:	Qld Youth Violence Taskforce and co-sponsored by the Queensland Police Service and Department of Communities
Stated purpose:	The purpose of the Forum was to engage young people aged 15 – 17 years on issues associated with youth violence and its occurrence within an everyday setting.
Who participated:	87 students from independent, private and public schools across SE Qld. The school network was used only to provide access to appropriately aged young people aged 15 to 17 years old.
Structure:	Students heard from distinguished guest speakers. Students were then placed in 14 working groups to work on 3 group sessions focusing on violence, alcohol and drug use and suggested strategies. A series of questions were asked of each group.
Findings/ messages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From students' discussion on violence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - violence often occurs on a group basis rather than one on one - violence is often related to status, alcohol intoxication and cultural conflict - miscommunication via technology is also a reason why some fights start - a negative public perception of youth generally contributes to feelings of low self worth - low self esteem makes them vulnerable to dangerous behaviour including joining gangs (to get a sense of belonging and status), carrying weapons (perceived as self protection), binge drinking (to help them socialise in a group setting) and negative peer influence (being egged on to smash someone) - students would respond to their peers before responding to authoritative figures - peer pressure influences the use of violence • Some of what students said about strategies to reduce violence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - continual educational reinforcement of how one action (i.e. one punch) can damage lives could assist to override other influences and encourage "mates" to assist their friends to walk away from explosive situations without it reflecting on their status - education about violence should be delivered by young people and role models and those who have been affected by youth violence (both as perpetrator and victim) - education (eg about violence, alcohol consumption and peer pressure) must start as early as possible, preferably in primary school and there should be a focus on promoting self esteem and positive images of young people - parents and the community also needed to be educated on these issues to shift what is socially acceptable - positive reinforcement is more effective than a punitive approach - ensuring confidentiality would result in increased use of school support programs - the educational advertising genre most preferred is the use of shock tactics similar to the <i>Because [Enough is Enough]</i> campaign, combined with positive images about being proud to be young and having the capacity to make choices.
Output/outcomes:	Strategies suggested to combat youth violence were analysed further by the Youth Violence Taskforce in their development of recommendations to Government. Students felt empowered by the Forum and agreed they would like it to be an annual event.
Information sources:	Youth Violence Taskforce.(2007) <i>Youth Violence Forum Summary Report: Student Discussions and Suggested Strategies to Combat Youth Violence</i> http://www.police.qld.gov.au/Resources/Internet/news%20and%20alerts/documents/Attachment%204%20Youth%20Violence%20Forum%20Report%20July07.pdf The full <i>Youth Violence Taskforce Report</i> and recommendations can be found at: http://stephenrobertsonmp.com/_dbase_upl/youthfinal.pdf

Activity:	Leading Responsibly in a Digital World Student Summit – Victoria
	Held in Melbourne on 13 October 2009
Organised by:	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria
Stated purpose:	To involve students as partners with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development as it develops and refines its policies and practices around the responsible use of digital technologies.
Who participated:	240 Year 10 students from 60 Victorian government and non-government schools
Structure:	Participants were asked to do some pre-summit activities to help them reflect on and articulate their views. At the Summit, students were invited to discuss their experiences in online communication, examine ways to foster and promote healthy and respectful online relationships and develop positive action plans to take back to their schools and share with classmates. The 60 accompanying teachers participated in workshops about strategies to support their students back at school.
Key messages:	No information appears to be publicly available at this stage.
Expected outcome:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students were expected to make a declaration about what it takes to lead responsibly in a digital world, and commit to taking an authentic leadership role back at their school. • Suggestions made before the Summit about what an action plan might contain included: continuing the conversation with other students, holding a parent information night, working with members of the school community in developing their skills online or 'even organising a student forum of your own with nearby schools'.
Information source:	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/elearningsupportservices/www/studentsummit/default.htm

Activity	Cyber Friendly Student Summit – Western Australia
	Held in Perth on 22 October 2008
Conducted by:	Conducted by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre from Edith Cowan University as part of a \$400,000 study into cyber bullying prevention
Stated purpose:	To obtain students' views about how to improve cyber safety and reduce the harms students can experience from cyber bullying
Who participated:	210 Year 10 students from across Western Australia
Structure:	Prior to the Summit, nominated students were invited to create an original multi-media submission about a key bullying topic. Throughout the Summit, an electronic voting system was used at regular intervals to encourage student involvement and to increase awareness of, and shift student's social norms. Adults who accompanied students were invited to attend a concurrent Seminar, and parents were invited to attend a Seminar in the evening.
Key findings:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When asked who they believed had the greatest responsibility to reduce cyber bullying among young people 48% indicated everyone (government, schools, parents/families and corporations) and 46% indicated 'young people'. • The aspects of cyber bullying of greatest concern to students at the Summit were the anonymity of the perpetrator (55%) and the public humiliation (26%). • When asked what role they could play in helping their community learn more: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 66% of students indicated they could work with younger students in a mentor role - 63% indicated they could show adults how to use technology and - 42% indicated they could assist schools with the development of policy and guidelines to address cyber bullying.
Output/outcomes:	The day culminated in a declaration stating what students believe needs to be done: the <i>Cyber Friendly Communities' Declaration against Cyber Bullying among Children and Young People</i> . Students concluded the most important thing a school can do is to ask young people what they think can be done and to listen.
Information sources:	Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University: http://chpru.ecu.edu.au/research/bullying/cyberfriendly.php Cyber Friendly Schools Project (and Summit) at: http://www.cyberfriendly.com.au/

Activity	Cyber-bullying Online Forum – New South Wales
	Held from 6 October to 7 November, 2008
Conducted by:	The NSW Youth Advisory Council and hosted on Youth NSW website
Stated purpose:	To consult with young people on the issue of cyber bullying in order to provide advice to the NSW Government on strategies to build awareness of cyber bullying and its affects.
Who participated:	A total of 65 legitimate users registered for the Forum, with the majority of these being young people aged between 12 and 21 years old (39 were female).
Structure:	The forum consisted of 5 discussion areas which posed 5 different questions related to cyber-bullying. To assist young people using the forum to fully understand and participate in the discussions, the Council developed a definition of cyber bullying.
Findings/messages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25 young people said they had been cyber bullied. The three most common ways they had been cyber bullied were through social network sites, in chat rooms and by email. Most of the young people said they were cyber bullied by someone they knew. - Young people's responses indicated awareness of basic strategies they can use to protect themselves against cyber bullying, (such as not giving out their real name to personal details, blocking people on social networking pages, email accounts and mobile phones) but many are not aware of what to do if cyber bullying becomes serious.
Output/outcomes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Council identified a number of key issues as a result of its review of the research and the Online Forum and made 8 recommendations to the NSW Government such as: "encouraging a better awareness and understanding of the issues among teacher and school communities, and including cyber bullying as a specific area of concern within the revised NSW Department of Education and Training Student Welfare Policy". - In regards to awareness raising in schools, the Council said "the Government should focus on educating and providing resources to teachers and students rather than investing in technology which attempts to block or protect users from harmful messages and images eg. firewalls, which are often ineffective and must be constantly updated."
Information sources:	NSW Youth Advisory Council, December 2008. <i>Report to the Minister for Youth on Cyber bullying.</i> http://www.youth.nsw.gov.au/data/page/1105/Cyber_bullying_Report.pdf

Activity:	Inaugural Australian Youth Forum (AYF) event – youTHINK
	Forum held Friday 20 February 2009 with pre- and post-forum website discussions
Organised by:	The Australian Youth Forum – launched in October 2008 and designed to the Government's direct communication channel with young Australians and the youth sector.
Purpose:	The youTHINK Forum was the AYF's first national event. Its purpose was to enable young people aged between 15-24 to express their views directly to Government on two issues: <i>Violence and safety</i> and <i>Contributing to Democracy</i> .
Who participated:	618 young people attended 10 Forums held simultaneously in all capital cities and in Alice Springs and Cairns, connected live by satellite. Half of the young people were aged 18 or under – 94 were under 16 and 209 were aged between 16-18. The remainder were over 18 or did not state their age.
Structure:	The forum was professionally facilitated. AYF also hosted a 'Have a say' discussion board on its website prior to the youTHINK event and an online discussion after the event. Information from participant evaluation forms gathered at the conclusion of the youTHINK event were analysed and an Evaluation Report published on the AYF website.
Findings/ messages:	Common themes among what young people said about violence and safety were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - violence is largely related to alcohol with a perceived direct linkage between binge drinking, cultural acceptance of drinking, underage drinking and a lack of education about responsible drinking - limited activities to engage young people and boredom can lead to irresponsible alcohol consumption and violence – so too can the lack of suitable youth spaces and services and/or lack of awareness of services

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is a lack of education on the consequences of violent behaviour and alternative conflict management strategies and this should be addressed with education programs implemented in the early years and continuing throughout school - parents and families can influence young people's acceptance of violence and some young people think parents themselves need to be better educated in handling conflict - the relationship between young people and the police needs to improve and policy should not automatically assume young people are going to cause trouble - the media legitimises violence and young people are too often represented as the perpetrators when often they are the victims as well - many young people feel unsafe on public transport and there needs to be more public transport at night and greater levels of security.
Output/outcomes:	Ideas from youTHINK were to be fed into <i>the Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians</i> .
Forum Evaluation:	<p>Most forum participants said the discussion topics were relevant; it was great to have their opinions taken seriously, and that hearing other peoples' views made them think differently about things. In relation to future events, participants commonly said that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a longer time should be allowed for promotion and planning of the event, - a broader range of young people should be engaged, with the focus on the 18-24 age group and minority groups, through engagement in their own communities, and - more time should be allowed for discussion, recording it and giving a concrete purpose for the discussion input.
Information sources:	<p>Australian Youth Forum. (2009) <i>Violence and Safety, A report on youTHINK findings and website discussions</i>. (Feb-March 2009). www.youth.gov.au/ayf/pages/response.htm</p> <p>Australian Youth Forum. (2009) <i>youTHINK Evaluation (February 2009)</i>: www.youth.gov.au/ayf/.../youTHINK_Feb09_EvaluationReport.rtf</p>

Activity	<i>(National) Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians</i>
	Announced on Thursday 16 June 2009 by the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport, The Hon Kate Ellis MP
Conducted by:	The House of Representatives Family and Youth Committee
Purpose:	<p>The Committee has been asked to specifically examine the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - perceptions of violence and community safety among young Australians; - links between illicit drug use, alcohol abuse and violence among young Australians; - the relationship between bullying and violence and the wellbeing of young Australians; - social and economic factors that contribute to violence by young Australians; and - strategies to reduce violence and its impact among young Australians <p>The Inquiry was prompted by the Mission Australia 2008 Survey of Young Australians which surveyed 45,558 Australians aged between 11 and 24. The survey found that 22 per cent of the young people who responded identified personal safety as a significant concern. This is a new issue that has not been identified by previous Mission Australia surveys.</p>
Structure:	<p>In addition to the call for submissions an online survey was developed to enable to develop a survey which will allow more young people to be involved, and in an anonymous way.</p> <p>The Inquiry has also held a youth forum, invited young people to attend public hearings and on 17 March heard from representatives of the NT Youth Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians - an advisory body made up of young people aged between 15 and 25 years that provide a link between young Territorians and the Northern Territory Government.</p>
Who participated:	More than 600 young people had responded to the online survey by 5 November 2009.
Output/outcomes	The deadline for written submissions to the Inquiry has expired and the online survey has closed however public hearings continue. There is no due date for the tabling of the Inquiry's report.
Information source:	House of Representatives Family and Youth Committee Youth Violence Inquiry webages: http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/youthviolence/index.htm

Activity	Focus groups on youth violence
Conducted by:	The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, in 2009
Purpose:	The Commission used the focus group sessions to explore the young people's perceptions of peer violence in order to inform the Commission's submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians. The focus groups related to the Inquiry's first Term of Reference.
Who participated:	Three separate focus groups were held with young people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first group was from YOS, a program of The Salvation Army that works with young people aged between 12 and 20 years, who are at risk of homelessness, are homeless and/or are in need of support. The group was part of the YOS Education Program for young people who want to study year 10, 11 and/or 12, offered as an alternate delivery model. This focus group consisted of five males and one female. - The second and third groups were students of Craigslea SHS. Consultation occurred with a group of six year 11 and 12 girls, and another group of three boys and three girls from across years 8, 9 and 10.
Structure:	The young people were asked to answer a series of questions examining their perceptions of violence and safety.
Findings/messages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The perception of 'being safe' is subjective. Young people across all groups found it easier to define what made them feel unsafe, rather than what 'safe' meant to them. - The YOS group felt less safe in their community possibly because issues with accommodation and support mean they have fewer options for avoiding violence and suggested that young people are regularly either the victims or the perpetrators of violence as a result of self-protective action. - The perceived level of violence in the community was rated as 'medium' by the majority of young people in all three focus groups, with the YOS group rating it medium to high. - The influence of family and peers was given as both a cause for violence among young people and as a means of reducing it. - The year 11/12 group at Craigslea SHS felt that most violence was perpetrated by males (but not exclusively) and reference was also made to an 'alpha male' or 'tough guy' image in the year 8/9/10 group. - The year 8/9/10 Craigslea group felt that violence among males was more to prove a point, more physical and more about keeping your reputation while violence among females was more verbal and starts mostly 'behind your back' as gossip.
Information source:	The Commission's submission is available on the Inquiry's website at: http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/youthviolence/subs/sub066.pdf