

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Sticks and Stones

Report on Violence in Australian Schools

**House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Employment, Education and Training**

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37th Parliament

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training inquire into and report on:

- . any changes in the nature, level, and incidence of violence in schools;
- . the types of violence which occur in schools;
- . the factors influencing violence in schools, including community structures and attitudes;
- . the impact of violence in schools on student performance and educational outcomes for particular groups of students and for students in general;
- . policies and programs at Federal, State and local levels to address cultures of violence; and
- . the range, availability and provision of intervention strategies, particularly models of exemplary practice.

* On 21 October, 1993 Mr Barry Wakelin replaced Mr Chris Miles resigned.

OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“The most untruthful of all schoolboy rhymes is the ‘names will never hurt me’ adage.”
Headmaster, Mentone Grammar School

Schools provide a safe learning environment for most children. It is erroneous to conclude that schools are unsafe. In some areas, rather than being places of violence, schools provide havens and places of safety away from the violent community. The media in its reporting of isolated incidents of school violence, has contributed to the community perception that the education system is violent and chaotic. It is easy to form the view that violence is a regular feature of school life. It is not.

Schools are part of the community and by and large reflect the behaviour patterns in the society in which they are located. It is unrealistic to expect that schools alone can provide solutions to a problem which largely finds its roots in the society.

The Committee's terms of reference restrict the examination of violence to that which occurs at school. The Committee accordingly has restricted its considerations to those actions that schools and education systems can take to make their schools safe places where students and teachers can achieve effective learning outcomes.

The Committee believes that schools must, and can, be managed so that children learn in a safe and happy school environment, without fear of emotional and physical abuse. Teachers also have the right to work in a environment free from violence and intimidation. Some violent incidents cannot be prevented. However, the Committee saw many examples of schools operating in a manner that ensured violence was an isolated and infrequent occurrence.

Invariably these are schools where the principal shows strong leadership and where the principal and teachers recognise that violent behaviour can be changed, and are dedicated to effecting that change. These schools have developed a whole school approach to addressing school violence. These schools ensure that students are aware of their rights. Importantly, however, emphasis is placed on students' responsibilities to themselves and others. Rules are applied consistently and fairly and have clearly stated consequences for positive and negative behaviours. The rules are developed jointly between parents, teachers and the students to create a sense of ownership. Appropriate behaviour is taught, not as a separate curriculum item, but as an integral part of the teaching process. Teachers are responsible for the pastoral care of students in their class, irrespective of the subjects that they teach.

The Committee visited one school which, within the space of four years, was able to change from a violent and unsafe place, into a school where violence has decreased, pupils feel safe and learning outcomes have improved. That school has created a culture of 'caring' which is evident to even a casual observer. These ends were achieved within the school's existing human and financial resources. Research into bullying in Australia shows that where schools have adopted policies involving staff, parents and pupils, irrespective of how well or poorly resourced they are, lower instances of bullying occur.

There are numerous programs that address different aspects of school violence specifically targeted at students, parents, teachers or a combination of these. Information on the effectiveness of these programs is largely anecdotal. It is argued by some that many of these programs are intrusive, expensive and compete for limited education funds.

The Committee accepts that while specifically targeted programs may be required, it cannot support the introduction of particular programs to address student behaviour until a proper evaluation of existing programs is undertaken. As a first step, the Committee believes that an examination should be undertaken of schools which report low incidences of violence to determine those aspects of the schools' approaches which have led to success.

The Committee recommends that:

- . **the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in consultation with State and Territory Ministers for Education, fund the evaluation of successful approaches adopted by schools to determine best practice; and**
- . **the results of that evaluation be published and disseminated (Paragraph 4.7).**

There is little data relating to the levels and changes in levels of violence in schools. To some extent violence has always existed in schools and apparent evidence of its increase may be a change in perceptions about what is considered violent behaviour. Most principals and teachers who provided written and oral evidence thought that while physical violence had declined, verbal abuse was increasing. Limited research has indicated that bullying is prevalent in Australian schools. Teachers are reporting that junior primary students and girls are now more likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour.

The Committee believes that it is important for qualitative and quantitative data on school violence to be collected on a national basis. Existing Australian research efforts have related to particular aspects, States or schools. A well designed and coordinated national survey would provide comprehensive and comparable data, allowing the development of effective preventative measures for use nationally.

The Committee recommends that:

the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in consultation with State and Territory Ministers for Education, finance the development of a national school violence data collection system (Paragraph 4.4).

The Committee received conflicting evidence concerning the causal relationship between violence, self esteem and learning outcomes. Some teachers link violent and anti-social behaviour with poor academic achievement and low self esteem. They believe that students exhibiting inappropriate behaviour, are students who have low self esteem as a result of low literacy and academic achievement. These students become frustrated and act out their frustrations in various violent ways.

Others contend that students who are bullies are seen to be average or above academic achievers and think well of themselves. It is the victim who generally lacks self esteem and fails to achieve. On balance the Committee believes that those who engage in overt physical violence, are generally students that have difficulty with literacy and the subsequent learning difficulties this creates across the curriculum.

Many students who have not enjoyed academic success would previously have left school at the completion of Year 10. The curriculum in the later years of schooling does not adequately reflect the change in the student population, and fails to prepare some students adequately for a life after school. Some students believe the chances of not getting a job are high and a consequent cycle of depression and anti-social behaviour follows.

Austudy has encouraged a number of poorly unmotivated students to remain at school. Attendance is the only criterion for payment.

The Committee recommends that:

the Minister for Employment, Education and Training review the attendance and performance eligibility criteria for Austudy for students in Years 11 and 12 (Paragraph 3.35).

While the Committee notes that a great deal can be achieved without additional resources, the achievement of positive outcomes places often unreasonable pressures on teaching staff. In its previous report *The Literacy Challenge*, the Committee recommended an increase in Commonwealth and State Government funding to the primary sector to the equivalent per student levels of the secondary sector. The current inquiry confirms the Committee's view that it is essential that primary schools receive increased resourcing.

Through this inquiry, the Committee has come to the view that the provision of increased funding to the primary sector would not only allow literacy to be addressed, but would also allow for the development and introduction of other early intervention programs and strategies to address behaviour and socialisation issues. The majority of evidence suggests that inappropriate behaviours are identifiable in children as early as pre-school and kindergarten. Changing a child's behaviour patterns after the age of eight requires significantly more resourcing, with reduced chances of success, than if the problem is addressed in the earliest schooling years. Not all behavioural problems are evident in primary school and effective strategies and programs to address violence in high school years are also required.

The Committee recommends that:

- . **the Minister for Employment, Education and Training discuss with the State and Territory Ministers for Education the need for early intervention strategies to address violent and anti-social behaviour in students (Paragraph 4.63).**

The essential teaching skill of behaviour management is best developed in the school environment. While preservice training can provide trainees with a theoretical background, it is only practical experience which will equip them to deal with disruptive students. States and Territories must ensure that ongoing professional development programs are available to all teachers so that these skills are maintained and upgraded.

Principals, teachers and community groups identify the portrayal of violence by the media and entertainment industries as a specific cause of school violence. Negative modelling and lack of balance act to reinforce negative values and contribute to violence. The Committee accepts that the media and entertainment industries are outside the control of the school. It is for parents to control the programs children watch and the video games they play.

The Committee recommends that:

- . **the Minister for Communications and the Arts commission a national research project to examine the effects of television, video, film and video games on the learning outcomes and behaviour of Australian children (Paragraph 3.29).**

The influence of parents and family on student behaviour cannot be ignored. Dysfunctional families, in which there is violence and other aggressive behaviours, influence the way children behave. It is essential that our Governments respond to the needs of families so that all children receive the support necessary for success in the school environment. The Committee supports the concept of positive parenting programs. Parents' programs help parents to deal with family conflict and assist them to establish rules, to deliver consistent punishment and to provide positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviour.

The Committee recommends that:

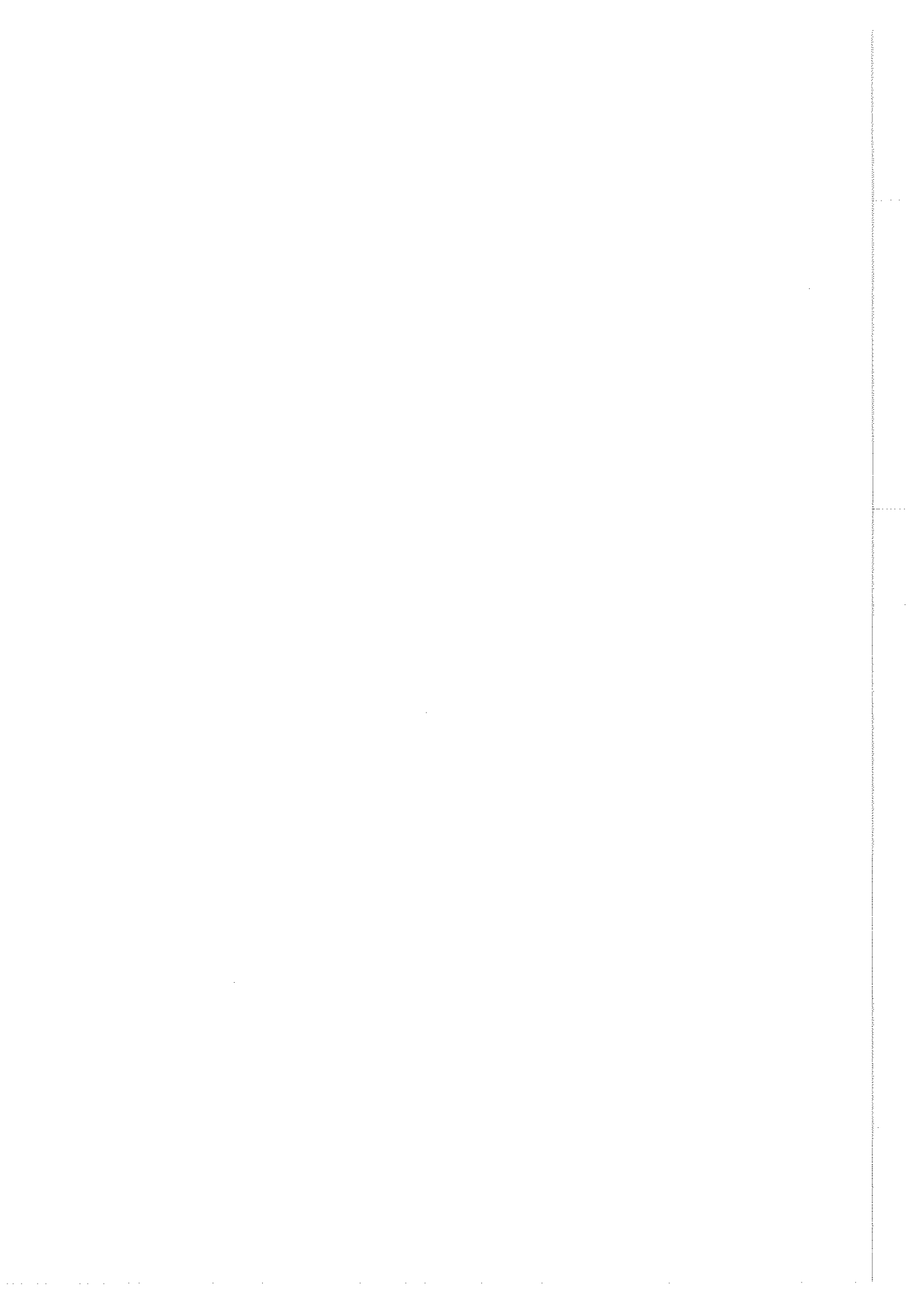
- . **the Minister for Human Services and Health, during the International Year of the Family, establish, in each State and Territory, pilot programs on positive parenting (Paragraph 4.21).**

The Committee notes that services provided to students and their families are often dispersed across many Government agencies and services are delivered in a manner which does not meet the needs of the client.

The Committee recommends that:

- . **the Prime Minister request the Premiers and Chief Ministers to examine the manner in which Government services are delivered to students and families requiring support from more than one agency (Paragraph 4.47).**

Finally, the Committee finds it unacceptable that a few students can disrupt the learning of others. Expulsion and exclusion must remain an option for schools. The Committee believes, however, that all systems must develop appropriate alternative education programs to assist these children. To exclude students and offer no support, is to condemn many of them to unemployment, social exclusion and the prison system, with subsequent costs to the individual and to the community.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What is School Violence?

1.1 The Committee accepts the view supported by the majority of evidence, that it is not only those violent acts which result in physical harm to people and buildings which is school violence. It is also those subtle and invisible acts of bullying which have the greatest detrimental impact on students, their emotions and their educational outcomes.

1.2 Both violent acts and bullying are therefore the two elements of school violence. It is the right of every child to learn in a safe and happy environment without fear of emotional and physical abuse. It is the right of all teachers to work in an environment free from violence and intimidation.

1.3 The Australian Education Union (AEU) provided the following definition:

Violence in schools is present in any situation where a member of the school community (teacher, student, other education worker, parent, or visitor) is intimidated, abused, threatened, or assaulted or their property deliberately damaged by another member of that community or the public in circumstances arising out of their activities in a school.¹

1.4 In offering this definition, the AEU emphasised to the Committee that violence in schools was not confined to the more dramatic instances of clear physical violence which attracted media attention. However, this view of physical violence, as portrayed by the media, appeared to be the commonly held view about violence in the community.

1.5 A definition was suggested similar to that of the AEU but including:

...and which occurs within normally accepted school hours and within normally accepted school boundaries and situations.²

1.6 This definition specifically excludes acts of violence which occur outside these normally accepted bounds, situations and times, or which represent acts perpetrated against the school by persons outside the school community.

1.7 Violent student behaviour largely has its influences outside the school and solutions cannot be found in isolation from those causes. It is unrealistic to draw a line at the school gate and suggest that what happens inside that boundary is the school's business, and what happens outside that boundary is the community's responsibility. However, this Committee's terms of reference limit it to an

examination of violence which occurs within schools. The Committee believes that schools, and the community within which they operate, must form strong and mutually beneficial ties to make schools places of safety.

Successful Schools

1.8 Successful schools provide safe learning environments through the introduction of a school wide ethos of non-violence to manage student behaviour. These schools create an environment in which students feel secure and have a sense of belonging.

1.9 Such an ethos is developed when principals and other senior school personnel demonstrate highly developed leadership skills and their management of the school leads to successful outcomes for both students and teachers. They are leaders who recognise that student behaviour can be changed and encourage and support teachers and school personnel to effect that change.

1.10 The Committee was told that the management of violent student behaviour was not a matter of control, discipline, sanction and the addition of greater punitive school policy. It was about providing students with understanding, support and intervention and the provision of educational alternatives for those students who needed specialised teaching and counselling. Dealing with violence in schools was about anticipation and prevention, and about creating a caring learning environment in which students developed an identity, and sense of achievement, were respected and could grow and mature. It was stated that strategies in dealing with violence were necessary, but in the end were secondary, to the mission of education.³

1.11 The Committee observed in many schools it visited, the implementation of the concept of the supportive school environment. One submission described the supportive school environment as an approach which was based upon the principles of social justice, participation and the facilitation of the development of pro-social behaviour.⁴

1.12 A whole school approach to student behaviour necessarily involves a number of elements:

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

1.13 This approach has been adopted widely in Australia and was in use in many of the schools visited during the inquiry. One State primary school⁵ visited,

for instance, drew its student population from families where seventy per cent of parents were unemployed. As recently as four years ago, the playground at that school was considered unsafe. The introduction of the supportive school environment approach eliminated these problems. The program which operated throughout the school, was not an isolated program, but an integral part of every aspect of school life.

1.14 The recognition by the principal and teachers that violent behaviour could be changed, and their dedication to effecting that change, largely contributed to the turn around in behaviour which the school experienced.

1.15 The program endeavoured to promote the well-being of all those who worked within the school community. Throughout the program, children in particular, learned skills in behaviour management and conflict resolution. Students learned mutual respect and cooperation. Students in Year 6 provided guidance and support for younger pupils and all students were responsible for observing and reporting incidents which were contrary to the philosophy of the school. By being successful, children gained confidence and felt positive about themselves and others.

1.16 The school had developed a clear set of rights as well as responsibilities. These were developed between the teachers, pupils and parents and were considered to be owned by the whole school community. The school had developed rules relating to learning, movement, treatment, problem solving, safety and talking and communication.

1.17 While there was concern about the lack of resources, the environment in the school was improved immeasurably, without the allocation of additional resources. The school had clearly stated consequences for behaviour. These consequences were positive for positive behaviour and negative for inappropriate behaviour. The rules were also applied consistently. In all academic streams the children were taught appropriate behaviour as an integral part of the teaching process.

1.18 The Committee also visited a Catholic boys' high school where over seventy-six per cent of the school's population came from non-English speaking backgrounds. As an older school, the school lacked many of the physical features which would now be an integral part of a modern school, such as roomy grassed playing areas.⁶

1.19 The school had overcome the potential for violent and disruptive behaviour and had created a positive and peaceful learning environment.

1.20 The school saw itself as part of the community and encouraged parental involvement. It had stated policies relating to the provision by teachers of positive role models for students, and teachers were actively involved in many aspects of the students' lives. The aim of the teachers was to teach the students and not the subject. Discipline was characterised by justice and consistency.

1.21 Each teacher was responsible for the pastoral care of the students in their class, irrespective of the subjects they taught. The school considered that positive reinforcement was one of the most powerful tools available to a teacher and they constantly recognised and encouraged the efforts and achievements of students.

1.22 The whole school approach to student behaviour included a policy which said that a student may not touch another student - a 'no hands' approach. Because of the limited amount of space available to students, this approach was effective in reducing violence which flowed from congestion.

Levels of Violence

1.23 Most witnesses and submissions advised that while any violence in schools must be viewed with concern, in general, violence was not out of control and schools were coping. In many instances schools were havens from the violence which existed in the wider community.

1.24 The NSW Teachers' Federation identified the need to put reported incidence of violence in perspective:

In New South Wales we have in the order of three-quarters of a million students in the school system. So, when you see reports of fifty or one hundred incidents of violence reported in a term or semester, it is a very small proportion of the number of students involved and the number of students affected.⁷

1.25 These views were shared by the National Committee on Violence which in its report *Violence: Directions for Australia* did not support the Australian media view that school violence was a serious and growing problem. Rather the Committee agreed that:

...there are disciplinary problems within many schools and that there are offences of various kinds and degrees of seriousness committed in and around schools, but that they are not necessarily cause for alarm or for vigorous reaction.⁸

1.26 The Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology cautioned against accepting the general view that violence was a problem in Australian schools. He suggested that Australia experienced a 'flow on' effect from publicity surrounding violence in American schools. He argued that there were aspects of school life in America such as metal detectors and strategies to provide protection from firearms, which, it was hoped, would never become part of the Australian scene.⁹

1.27 The Committee notes the views of the Director. The Committee believes however that the community perceives that violence is common and is increasing in schools. There is a danger that because current levels of school violence do not match those of the United States, appropriate preventative strategies may not be

considered necessary. This may mean Australia could face similar problems to those in the United States in the future.

1.28 The NSW Teachers' Federation also suggested that schools were much more likely to report violent episodes to the police than previously, if only to act as a deterrent to the perpetrator in reinforcing the notion of unacceptable behaviour. The Federation believed this increased reporting was leading to a greater recording of the levels of school violence. Data which was available, showed that a child's chances of being assaulted outside a school was far greater than at the school.¹⁰

1.29 One submission argued that if a definition of violence was used which excluded acts perpetrated against the school by persons outside the school community and which discounted acts of violence occurring outside school hours and outside school boundaries and situations, then:

It is my belief that if this definition were used it could be readily shown that the level and incidence of violence in schools is remarkably low.¹¹

1.30 There is little data relating to the level and changes in the levels of violence in schools. The AEU advised that violence had to some degree always existed in schools. The AEU had become aware, however, of increasing concern amongst teachers that the problems being brought into schools were increasing both in quantity and degree.¹²

1.31 The Australian Institute of Criminology commented that currently, given the lack of comprehensive and consistent national data, it was difficult to ascertain changes in the nature level and incidence of violence in schools. In the absence of comprehensive data, public perceptions about school violence were often shaped by media reports.¹³

1.32 Statistics from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics pointed to an increase in school violence reported to the police between 1990-1992. The statistics were drawn from police reports for all schools including private, primary and secondary level. However, the number of students reported as violent in 1992 represents only 0.04 per cent of students in New South Wales. In 1990, 282 cases of violent assaults (not including threats or sexual assaults) were reported and that figure increased to 408 in 1992, the biggest increase being in the most serious category of aggravated assault from 50 in 1990, to 80 in 1992.¹⁴

1.33 The Committee was advised that any data on school violence underestimates the levels of violence because of disincentives to report violence by students and school authorities. One submission suggested that teachers in New South Wales were somewhat cynical about New South Wales Department of School Education figures which identified that in the first five months of 1993, 59 incidents of school violence occurred. When these figures were quoted:

...the spontaneous question of some teachers was as to which school on which day did these 59 incidents occur?¹⁵

1.34 One of the few sources of information on school violence were school suspension or exclusion reports. A study of suspension reports of Australian Capital Territory Government schools between 1990-1992, found an increase in female participation in acts of violence such as 'physical abuse', 'misuse of property' and 'vandalism'. The data for 1990, 1991 and the first half of 1992, suggested that there was an upward trend in violence-related or victim-oriented behaviours such as physical abuse, sexual harassment and vandalism and that acts of violence accounted for at least sixty per cent of all the reasons for suspension in that period.¹⁶ The total number of suspensions in 1991 was 447 out of a total Australian Capital Territory Government school population of over 40 000 students.

1.35 The usefulness of suspension data was limited because schools differed in their definition and classification of offending behaviour. The Committee was also told that many students were excluded from school and those exclusions did not appear in official statistics.¹⁷

1.36 It was suggested that while violence was increasing at all levels of the system it was particularly so in junior primary school with many four to six year old children involved in acts of violence.¹⁸ The trend was difficult to explain but highlighted the need for intervention strategies to be developed and applied in the earliest years of schooling.¹⁹

1.37 The majority of teachers and principals who provided written or oral evidence thought that while physical violence had declined, verbal abuse was increasing. Some however thought physical violence was also increasing. One principal advised that:

I am dealing with violent acts at an increasing rate. Many incidents are more violent - greater injury or damage is inflicted - than they have been in the past.²⁰

1.38 There was a perception by teachers that they were having to deal with increases in violence both in quantity and degree. One educator advised of marauding gangs entering schools and attacking pupils and knifings at school bus stops.²¹

1.39 While acts of overt physical violence were rare events in most schools, bullying was prevalent. Australian research found that one child in seven reported being bullied at least once a week by others at school and while distribution amongst schools was uneven, in some schools the incidence was one in four.²² A survey of South Australian teachers concluded that:

While acknowledging that the most frequently reported misbehaviours are relatively minor breaches of classroom discipline, it is disturbing to note that pupil to pupil verbal abuse and physical aggression occur in about one in six classes almost daily, or daily. It seems that the harassment of pupils by other pupils in classrooms is relatively common.²³

1.40 The Committee was told that one of the biggest unrecognised aspects of violence in schools was gender harassment. As a component of violence, it was widespread in schools and was largely unrecognised as a violent act. One survey found that, as part of their day to day routine, girls in co-educational classrooms and school yards suffered sex-based harassment from boys and sometimes teachers.²⁴ The Committee was also advised that physical violence amongst girls was more likely to occur than it was in the past.²⁵ Harassment and violence is also directed towards gay, lesbian and bisexual students.²⁶

1.41 Racist attitudes of some students, parents and teachers expressed as violent acts, harassment, discrimination, name calling and vilification added to the wider culture of school violence. The Committee was told that racist attitudes appeared widespread, and were a significant contributor to school violence, however, not to the extent that bullying impacted on students. The principal of a school with children from varying ethnic backgrounds advised that any violent behaviour occurred within ethnic groups rather than between them.²⁷ Informal evidence suggested that in one major capital at least, the conflict between ethnic gangs was based on territorial jurisdiction rather than on racist grounds.

1.42 The Committee also received evidence of violence by students on teachers. Levels were not known, but surveys suggested that violence against teachers by students and parents was at an unacceptable level and increasing.

1.43 The Australian Institute of Criminology believed that a comprehensive national data collection and mandatory reporting of school violence, based on the consistent use of an agreed definition, was necessary to determine more accurately the level and nature of violence in schools.

1.44 While extensive research evidence in Australia does not exist, it appears from the Committee's discussions and evidence presented during the inquiry, that apart from serious isolated incidents, the violence is primarily non-physical. Literature points to low levels of reporting of any form of violence.

Addressing Violence

1.45 The Committee agrees with the three broad strategies for addressing violence, developed by the National Committee on Violence, namely to:

- . change the culture which tolerated violence;
- . tackle issues which were likely to exacerbate violence; and
- . ensure accurate, uniform and immediate information on violence was available on a regular basis.²⁸

1.46 The Committee believes that the existence of any school violence justifies the attention and the commitment of resources, irrespective of its nature and level. The many programs which have been developed to address violence have not been properly evaluated for effectiveness. The Committee is also disturbed that the

responsibility for addressing anti-social behaviour in students is fragmented across a multiplicity of agencies, and services are delivered in an uncoordinated manner.

1.47 The Committee is also concerned that some of the violence which exists in schools is a result of the failure of education systems to provide proper resources and to develop a curriculum which is relevant to the needs of students who would previously have left school at the completion of Year 10.

1.48 Schools are generally staffed by highly trained and dedicated professionals. The effectiveness of teachers however, is influenced by the support provided by the system as a whole.

1.49 The Committee is aware of the positive influence of multi media campaigns addressing public health issues such as smoking, AIDS and healthy lifestyles (Life Be In It).

1.50 It is outside the Committee's terms of reference to make recommendations addressing levels of violence in the wider society. The Committee notes, however, a recommendation made by the National Committee on Violence, which states:

The Federal Government should undertake a national multi-media public awareness campaign conveying the message that violence is not acceptable. Campaigns directed at target audiences should be designed and pilot tested prior to full implementation.²⁹

Chapter 1 - Endnotes

- 1 Australian Education Union, *Submission*.
- 2 Jenkin, J, University of Western Sydney, *Submission*.
- 3 Denholm, C, University of Tasmania, *Submission*.
- 4 Ledez, J, University of Southern Queensland, *Submission*.
- 5 Mayfield Primary School, Launceston, Tasmania.
- 6 Patrician Brothers High School, Granville, Sydney.
- 7 NSW Teachers' Federation, *Transcript*, p. 656.
- 8 National Committee on Violence, *Violence: Directions for Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology, 1990, p. 49.
- 9 Chappell, D, Director, Australian Institute of Criminology, *Transcript*, p. 401.
- 10 NSW Teachers' Federation, *op.cit.*, p. 657.
- 11 Jenkin, J, *op.cit.*
- 12 Australian Education Union, *op.cit.*
- 13 Australian Institute of Criminology, *Submission*.
- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 Bowie, V, University of Western Sydney, *Submission*.
- 16 Omaji, P, Edith Cowan University, *Submission*.
- 17 Discussions, Boys' Town, Engadine, Sydney.
- 18 Department of Education, Employment and Training, South Australia, *Submission*.
- 19 Australian Education Union, *op.cit.*
- 20 Department of Education, Employment and Training, South Australia, *op.cit.*
- 21 Confidential Submission.
- 22 Rigby, K, University of South Australia, & Slee, P, Flinders University, *Submission*.
- 23 Adey, K, Oswald, M & Johnson, B, *Discipline in Schools - A Survey of Teachers, Survey No. 1*, University of South Australia, 1991, p. 9.
- 24 Milligan, S, & Thomson, K, *Listening to Girls*, Australian Education Council, 1991, p. 5.
- 25 Omaji, P, *op.cit.*
- 26 Gay and Lesbian Teachers and Students Association Incorporated, *Submission*.
- 27 Discussions, Alice Springs High School, Alice Springs.
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- 29 *ibid.*, p. 124.

CHAPTER 2

NATURE AND EFFECT OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Introduction

2.1 The Committee agrees with views expressed that schools are part of society and by and large reflect the violence in the society in which they are located. Young people bring problems experienced outside the school to the classroom and playground. The Committee considers that it is the responsibility of all schools and their communities to address the question of student violence.

2.2 The National Committee on Violence cautioned against advancing simplistic explanations for violent behaviour. The report stated that violence is complex, and while certain traits, characteristics or other factors may be associated with violence, they are not necessarily the cause.¹

2.3 This Committee agrees with the view that violence does not arise from a single cause. The interaction of a number of factors manifest themselves in school violence. The Committee found that factors contributing to school violence closely mirrored those identified by the National Committee on Violence, although with different emphases. Evidence suggested the following influences in the school context:

- . the family;
- . cultural factors - especially social and economic inequality;
- . media influences; and
- . aspects of the school environment.

2.4 An understanding of the theories on violent behaviour are helpful in understanding its causes. Theories explaining violence can be categorised as intra-individual, social psychological and socio-cultural.² A brief outline is at Appendix 4.

2.5 In the absence of national data on school violence, it is not possible for the Committee to categorically state the extent of school violence, nor to say whether there has been any increase. There was widespread concern both about a perceived increase in bullying and gender harassment, and the incidence of the more extreme forms of violence. While overt acts of violence causing physical harm and damage may not be the overriding feature of Australian schools, the Committee is concerned at the apparent high levels of bullying behaviours.

2.6 Teachers' unions believed that violence was increasing at all levels, but was particularly noticeable at junior primary levels. It appeared that levels of bullying in primary schools was prevalent and increasing, and violence amongst girls was also

rising. The unions also noted that violence by students on teachers was at levels which gave cause for concern.

Bullying

2.7 It was clear from submissions that bullying was seen as prevalent in the Australian school system and the views of teachers and principals was supported by research data, the only detailed data which was available on any type of school violence in Australia.

2.8 Bullying was defined as repeated and unprovoked negative behaviour (both physical and non-physical) directed by more powerful students or groups of students against less powerful students. Bullying included harassment (sexual and racial) but also covered more personal aspects of aggression and violent behaviour directed towards individuals.³

2.9 Bullying does not include acts of violence between individuals or groups of approximately the same strength. In order for there to be bullying there needed to be an imbalance of strength.⁴ Therefore, while all bullying can be viewed as violence, not all violent and anti-social behaviour can be viewed as bullying.

2.10 Detailed studies on school bullying, involving more than ten thousand students and over thirty schools, were conducted in South Australia. More recently, limited studies were undertaken in Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria. The results of the studies indicated that about one in seven students were bullied and that approximately five per cent of the student population were bullies. The studies indicated that bullying tended to decrease with age. Nevertheless violent bullying behaviour in secondary schools was only slightly less common.⁵ Other data available to the Committee confirmed these results for other areas of Australia.⁶

2.11 It was found that there was no difference between rural and urban schools in terms of the amount of bullying. There was however a wide variation between schools in the extent to which bullying occurred. In some schools the percentage of students who reported bullying was as low as four per cent and in other schools it was as high as thirty or forty per cent. What seemed to affect the extent to which bullying occurred, was the extent to which school staff were involved in the students lives.⁷

2.12 The commonly held view that the aggressive behaviour of bullies towards their environment could be explained as a reaction to failure and frustration was not supported by the research data. The Australian studies and those conducted overseas indicated that while there could be an association between poor academic achievement and aggressive behaviour, the results did not show that the behaviour of the aggressive bullies was a consequence of poor academic achievement and failure at school. Nor was there any indication that the bullies lacked self esteem.⁸ Some researchers however argued that the anxiety and insecurity bullies felt were repressed and difficult to identify.⁹

2.13 The studies found however that the children who were victimised had significantly lower levels of self esteem. Typically one fifth of the students in the South Australian studies reported that they felt unsafe at school. Sixteen to twenty per cent of students truanted because they were being bullied on a regular basis. Many more students advised that they would stay away if they could.¹⁰ The researcher did not assess the impact these effects had on learning outcomes.

2.14 The Committee has little Australian data available to determine the impact of bullying both on the perpetrator and the victim. It received one disturbing example where a student committed suicide, allegedly because he was bullied throughout his high school education.¹¹

2.15 Some overseas data indicated that young students who were aggressive and bullied others in school ran a clearly increased risk of later engaging in other problem behaviours such as criminality and alcohol abuse. It was found that approximately sixty per cent of boys who were characterised as bullies in Years 6 to 9 had at least one conviction at the age of twenty-four. Even more dramatically, as many as thirty-five to forty per cent of the former bullies had three or more convictions at this age.¹² Statistics do not exist on the numbers of former bullies who are in Australian prisons. However, in those areas where Australian studies replicated overseas studies, the results were similar. It is possible, therefore, that the number of Australian offenders who were bullies, is similar to those in other countries. As it costs an average of \$45 000 per year to maintain a prisoner in Australia, efforts directed to reducing bullying in school have the potential of reducing the costs to the Australian community.

2.16 The extent of bullying in the Australian school system was not always recognised by the school community. While students were aware of the degree of bullying in schools, the school community typically under-estimated the extent to which it occurred. While individual schools were adopting policies to address the problem, the Committee was told that generally this was not happening at the system level.¹³

Violence Based on Gender

2.17 The Committee was told that one of the biggest unrecognised aspects of violence in schools was gender harassment. As a component of violence it was very widespread in schools and it was largely unrecognised as a violent act.¹⁴

2.18 The National Gender and Violence Project, coordinated by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), surveyed a sample of schools in every State and Territory and concluded that as a part of their day to day routine, girls in co-educational classrooms and schoolyards suffered sex-based harassment from boys and sometimes teachers. Girls accommodated this harassment in different ways. Some reacted with hostility and anger, but it caused many to be passive and docile, restricted their access to space, equipment and the attention of the teachers, and undermined their feelings of safety, self confidence and worth. It

was found that the teaching profession was not unanimous in recognising that this was a serious educational problem, but the rising weight of opinion was that harassment needed to be reduced, and some pioneering work to adapt school policies and practices was under way.¹⁵

2.19 Surveys indicated that violence based on gender, together with bullying, were the most systematic and constant forms of violence within schools. In the majority of cases men and boys were the perpetrators of violence based on gender and girls, women and boys their victims. While girls perpetrated some forms of violence it was argued that they were reacting to a whole range of constraints that were placed on them because of their gender.¹⁶

2.20 Sexist structures, particularly in primary schools, where in the majority of cases, female teachers were supervised by male principals, inculcated in students a view of women as nurturers and teachers rather than as capable of exercising authority. The Committee understands that while eighty per cent of teachers in primary schools are women, only twenty to thirty per cent are principals.

2.21 For many boys being 'tough' was their understanding of what it was to be male. Aggressive play by boys towards girls was often described as 'typical' or 'boys will be boys' behaviour. It was even encouraged. It was the acceptance of this behaviour as normal which was most damaging in the school environment. It was this use by boys of aggression to gain power and dominate which was intimidating and threatening to girls and undermined their whole experience of school.

2.22 Violence in schools reflected the same gendered patterns as violence in the broader community. Statistical and anecdotal evidence identified boys as the main perpetrators and victims of violent acts and bullying in schools. In Western Australia boys were suspended for physical assault twenty-five times more often than girls, and four times more often for verbal assault. In Victoria eighty-three per cent of those suspended were boys. Boys were being suspended largely for physical and verbal abuse, while girls were suspended for smoking. Preliminary results from research into sexual harassment and violence in primary schools in Queensland strongly supported the contention that the majority of violent behaviours were committed by boys and that many girls and some boys were targets of that violence. Boys' aggressive behaviour in the classroom was responsible for an emphasis being placed on the curriculum to meet boys' needs, rather than the needs of both boys and girls, as teachers sought to achieve a more manageable classroom.¹⁷

2.23 The Committee believes that the educational opportunities for girls must be equal to those of boys. The link between violence and masculinity must be addressed and alternatives to aggressive and threatening behaviour learned. It is essential to deal with the issues of power and control in any attempt to eliminate violence based on gender.

Racism and Ethnic Violence

2.24 Evidence suggested that racism, as a contributor to violence, was evident in schools, as it was in the community. The Victorian Community Relations in Education Project, working in the area of racism, identified a lack of understanding of what constituted racism, as one of the main obstacles to countering its effect. The lack of knowledge of the extent of racism in schools, the perceived lack of support available to those reporting racism and a lack of will by principals and administrators to deal with reported incidents, compounded the frustration and aggression of those being victimised.¹⁸

2.25 Name calling, teasing, verbal abuse, labelling, exclusion from activities and classes and limited physical violence were examples of racism which occurred in schools which were most frequently mentioned in consultations conducted by the Victorian Community Relations in Education Project. The Committee was told that racism should be addressed by linking the development of anti-racist strategies and approaches to the development of an inclusive curriculum, improving teaching practice and classroom management, and developing an agreed school policy with guidelines and procedures for dealing with racist incidents.

2.26 Australia's immigrant population often held quite different views about authority, gender relationships and education. As part of the assimilation process in schools, these views needed to be recognised and addressed.

2.27 The Aboriginal Education Unit of the Department of Education, Employment and Training in South Australia, advised that Aboriginal students in many schools were involved in violence at a number of levels. Much of the violence committed towards and by Aboriginal students was the outcome of wider racist community attitudes. While anti-racism policies existed, they did not necessarily result in a reduction of racist harassment unless whole school programs existed to address violent and disruptive behaviour.¹⁹

Violence on Teachers

2.28 The Committee was told of a consistent pattern of unacceptable levels of both physical and verbal aggression towards teachers. Teachers and their unions saw violence as an important health and safety issue. The AEU did not accept that its members should accept levels of violence and intimidation as an occupational hazard and argued that it was the responsibility of the employer to provide a safe working environment.²⁰

2.29 A survey in May 1993 of Australian Capital Territory Government teachers, revealed 430 incidents of violence towards staff, approximately 1.2 incidents per school per four weeks. In that survey, primary and special schools reported the highest number of incidents, with most incidents occurring in the

classroom and in the playground. Female staff were the main recipients and male students were in the main the perpetrators. Incidents included:

- . foul language 59 per cent;
- . physical assault 28 per cent;
- . use of weapons 8.5 per cent; and
- . vandalism 4.5 per cent.²¹

These incidents occurred in a system with forty thousand students and nearly three thousand teachers.

2.30 A survey conducted for the State School Teachers Union of Western Australia in 1993, sought information on the levels of assaults, verbal abuse and personal property damage experienced by teachers. Verbal assaults were the most common form of assault, with over four thousand seven hundred incidents identified. Over one thousand three hundred teachers experienced physical violence. There were just over six hundred cases of damage to property recorded. The results of the survey were similar to, but slightly lower than, survey results in 1992 and found that schools drawing from apparently similar community populations reported slightly different experiences in terms of the types of assaults.²²

2.31 More than a quarter of the schools who responded to the survey reported cases of severe verbal assault (ie. repeated direct abuse was reported). Around sixty per cent of schools reported no incidents of physical assault, with more than forty per cent of schools reporting damage to teachers' personal property. One of the key findings of the survey suggested that the issue of reducing the incidents of violence would best be addressed on an individual school basis. Western Australia has a Government school student population of two hundred and twenty-one thousand and employs fourteen thousand teachers.

2.32 Two studies conducted in South Australia indicated that there was a fairly consistent pattern of minor discipline problems across the R to 12 spectrum. No single problem emerged as an issue of individual concern. However, the authors considered it reasonable to suggest that the accumulative effect of these problems posed significant management difficulties, which not only impeded the teaching process, but presented a major source of teacher stress. While only affecting a small minority of teachers, student aggression directed at teachers was reported at all levels in country schools. In the city, it seemed to be confined to junior primary schools.²³

2.33 In response to the Committee's inquiry, the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals conducted a survey of a cross section of Victorian Government secondary schools to obtain a base of information on which to form a representative response to the Committee. Of the forty-three schools which responded, sixteen noted that there had been violent actions by students towards staff. Anecdotal evidence to respective Association committee members identified a significant and growing problem with trespassers on school grounds. Invasions by alienated or disaffected former students occurred in school hours and could include violence. The

survey confirmed the problem, with six respondents identifying 'trespasser-to-staff' violence.²⁴

2.34 Figures supplied by the New South Wales Department of School Education for 1993, indicated that in the first five months of 1993, 59 incidents of school violence were identified, of which eight involved violence against teachers. One submission warned however that in using these figures the possible large under reporting must be kept in mind. Teachers in the field treated such figures with scepticism.²⁵

Effects of Violence

2.35 Violence which occurs within the school setting has an enormous impact on students. It can compound the violence which students are suffering outside school and lead to further acts of violence. The impact on their behaviour, feelings and reactions can be profound and complex. However, the Committee agrees that, other than substantial anecdotal evidence, insufficient information exists to provide a detailed picture of its effects.

2.36 School violence deprives all who fall victim to it their right to an education. Children who were seriously victimised suffered greatly, often not only physically, but also psychologically, through a generalised fear of others, low self esteem and depression. The damage persisted in some cases into adult years. Victims felt both physically and emotionally threatened. Violence resulted in low self esteem, truancy, illness, stress, tiredness, disruptive behaviour, lack of concentration, and an inability to form relationships. It also reduced a student's ability to achieve academically and socially.²⁶

2.37 Teachers and principals generally agreed that violent students were usually not achieving at their optimum level. Victims however carried the greatest scar as a result of bullying.

2.38 Violent, powerful and controlling behaviours from males affected girls' participation in education and their educational outcomes. Girls who were victims of bullying either became angry or withdrawn. Their feelings of safety, self confidence and worth were undermined. As a result, their access to space, teaching time and facilities was reduced. Girls of ethnic background were judged to be even further disadvantaged. It was also suggested to the Committee that girls purposely 'underachieved' in order to avoid attention, particularly in a co-educational setting.²⁷

2.39 The Committee was told that the effect of violence on Aboriginal students was greater than for other students. In South Australia, Aboriginal students consistently attained academically at a significantly lower level than other students. Many factors contributed to this outcome, however it was argued that a violent school environment was not conducive to productive study.²⁸

2.40 Account must also be taken of the ability of teachers to teach effectively where violence was prevalent. It was both a distraction of their time and a factor adding to stress which impacted on the teaching and learning environment. The Committee was told that levels of stress amongst teachers was increasing. Surveys in some schools had indicated that fear of violence from students and parents was a significant cause of this stress.²⁹

2.41 The effects of violence were also evident in the community. The cost added to welfare, health, policing, corrective services, insurance and the maintenance of public services was judged in one submission to be equivalent to the cost involved in running a substantial community campaign to combat violence.³⁰

2.42 Teachers' unions expressed concern about the impact of violence on their members. The Committee was told that education departments had limited capacity to provide long-term care to people who were affected by violent behaviour. Teachers who were assaulted had great difficulty in returning to school. Many of them never returned.³¹ It was not always the physical assault that caused the major problems. Verbal assault, or a place in which their security was threatened by students, had a devastating impact on teachers' confidence and on their ability to feel safe in a school environment. Teachers were sometimes transferred to another school, rather than the system addressing the violence which had occurred.³²

2.43 The NSW Teachers' Federation was concerned about the compensation available to teachers. Careers were destroyed by violent acts, yet the workers' compensation payments were small. The rate at which the Federation assisted teachers with workers compensation, or other civil legal actions arising out of work related injuries, stress being a large component of that, had doubled in one year. The Federation suggested that financially it would be unable to continue to provide support to its members if this rate of increase continued.³³

Literacy and Violence

2.44 The Committee's previous reports *Literacy Needs in the Workplace*³⁴ and *The Literacy Challenge*³⁵ identified, respectively, that more than one million Australians were illiterate, about thirty-five per cent of whom were native English speakers, and that between ten and twenty per cent of children finished primary school with literacy problems. *The Literacy Challenge* reported a strong relationship between low levels of literacy and high levels of unemployment and social disadvantage.

2.45 The Students at Risk (STAR) component of the National Equity Program, administered by DEET, funded a project in 1993 for 'at risk' students which addressed illiteracy. The proposal for funding stated:

Illiteracy is often one of the root causes of many other problems, such as homeless children, teenage suicide, violence, and young offenders against the law. The ability to read and write is so

tied up with a child's self esteem and confidence that people who work in the field see these problems start to emerge as early as Infant School and escalate as they approach the high school years.³⁶

2.46 Of one thousand homeless youth aged between eleven and sixteen presenting each month to Melbourne Citymission's Information Deli at Flinders Street, it was estimated that fifty to sixty per cent had numeracy and literacy problems. Some were totally illiterate and innumerate.³⁷

2.47 In oral and written evidence, teachers invariably linked violent and anti-social behaviour with poor academic achievement and low self esteem. Some teachers believed that students who exhibited inappropriate behaviours were in a vicious cycle - students who had low self esteem as a result of low academic achievement became frustrated and their frustrations were acted out in various violent ways.

2.48 Some research suggested that illiteracy resulted from a combination of interrelated factors - physical, socio-cultural, curriculum and self concept and personality factors. The Committee's view however is that most students can become literate regardless of their social and economic backgrounds. The attainment of literacy depends on the mix of teaching strategies used in the classroom. The Committee was told that low self esteem can result from bullying and that this feeling of rejection can lead to a diminished ability to learn or acquire literacy. Other evidence suggested that low self esteem, caused by low literacy levels, led to frustration and consequent violent behaviours. Research and evidence to the Committee agreed that building an individual's self esteem could be a key to literacy.³⁸

2.49 On the other hand a number of witnesses advised that a lack of ability to read did not mean students would react violently.³⁹ A teacher in a child detention centre, for instance, advised that literacy levels of inmates was very similar to levels in mainstream schools.⁴⁰ Staff of an alternative school for violent pupils told the Committee that the students were considered to be 'functionally literate'.⁴¹

2.50 Studies conducted in Adelaide revealed that students did not perceive bullies to be lacking in self esteem, and that in the absence of differing evidence from teachers, it could be taken that teachers shared this view. The bullies themselves appeared to perform at average levels, or above, and they felt good about themselves and felt that they achieved well at school.⁴²

2.51 There is no doubt that most teachers see that there is a link between low academic achievement and violent and anti-social behaviour. However their views appear to be in conflict with the results of the studies on bullying. There may be

two explanations. The first is that low self esteem in bullies could be masked. One witness advised that:

...with the ones that are aggressive, often when you deal with their aggression and reduce it they then show anxiety and depression underneath - the aggression masks it. This is not uncommon. People are continually surprised to hear it.⁴³

2.52 The second explanation may be that extreme physical violence is the main violence 'seen' by the teacher. While teachers readily identify physical violence, they invariably underestimate the levels of bullying occurring in their schools. As stated previously, bullying behaviours are acts of aggression involving persons or group of unequal strengths. Accordingly not all violence is bullying. Teachers may be correct in their view therefore, that the most extreme forms of violent and anti-social behaviour are often associated with poor academic achievement.

2.53 The Committee supports the views of principals and teachers that there is a link between student behaviour and poor literacy. The Committee believes therefore that while violent behaviour will not be eliminated, a concerted literacy program would lead to reduced levels of anti-social behaviour in schools.

Chapter 2 - Endnotes

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- 34 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Words at Work*, AGPS, 1991.
- 35 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *The Literacy Challenge*, AGPS, 1993.
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CHAPTER 3

INFLUENCES ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Community and Family

3.1 The community generally believes that violence in society is increasing. It is of fundamental importance to recognise that schools are part of that society and by and large reflect the behaviour of the society in which they are located. It is unrealistic to expect that schools alone can provide solutions to problems which have their origins in the wider society.

3.2 There has been a change in the way people live and react to one another. It was argued that competition and consumerism had replaced humanistic and more social societal forms such as the family and religion. Many informal support mechanisms no longer existed and individuals were becoming more isolated in their local communities. The fear of not having the skills to compete or live up to the perceived standards of others caused alienation for many people.

3.3 Overwhelmingly it was reported to the Committee that the influence of parents and families was the most important determining factor on students who behaved violently at school. Dysfunctional families where there was violence, other aggressive behaviours and a lack of positive parental role models, influenced the way children behaved.

3.4 The continuing difficulties experienced by women, as a result of structural and social impediments in achieving economic independence, meant that many women were forced to remain in violent relationships. The modelling seen by young people living in a violent domestic situation provided the standard for their own behaviour.

3.5 Studies of children who had suffered sexual physical abuse in the family showed that they had greater difficulty coping with the demands of school. The National Committee on Violence stated that the majority of young homeless people reported that they had left home because they had been physically, emotionally or sexually abused.¹ A large proportion of students at Boys' Town had experienced physical, sexual and emotional victimisation in the family.² More and more schools represent the one major socialising agency available to many students.³

3.6 The issue of parental authority at home was a vexed one for many. Evidence suggested that parents were confused at conflicting expert advice on how to discipline children. It was generally agreed that children were much more forthright, assertive, and aware of their rights and parents who were not confident of their own rights or roles, or who lacked self esteem themselves, were often operating from a very weak position and were overwhelmed.⁴ Such parents generally resorted to patterns of behaviour with which they themselves were

familiar, perhaps corporal punishment or other aggressive behaviours, because of their inability to understand their proper role. Children themselves then used these learned behaviours. The results of Australian and overseas research suggested that children who bullied others generally come from homes where:

- . there was a lack of warmth and involvement by parents;
- . aggressive behaviour by the child was tolerated; and
- . parents used physical punishment and violent emotional outbursts.⁵

3.7 Children had been given greater freedom and rights but many had not acquired the knowledge or skills to use their freedom in a responsible manner.

3.8 The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission concluded that Governments had generally not responded to the needs of families in times of growing pressures. The Commission observed that while Governments were prepared to provide economic support when a family broke down, they did not support services which might have prevented that breakdown.⁶

3.9 The National Committee on Violence directed several of its recommendations to assisting parents in developing non-violent means of discipline, both through the provision of materials and the conduct of parent effectiveness programs.⁷

3.10 Parents' attitudes to education and school could also influence childrens' behaviour. Many parents transferred their negative view of their own schooling to their children, which resulted in anti-social behaviour in schools.

3.11 Conflicting advice was received on the effects of both parents or a single parent working full time, and the consequent lack of supervision of children who experienced this work pattern. Some evidence argued that it created instability for children and an opportunity for illegal behaviour and reduced the opportunities for parents to provide students with the social skills necessary in a civilised society.⁸ Others did not accept that parents working hard was detrimental to the welfare of their children. It was argued that previously parents had more 'contact time' with their children, reinforcing the child's sense of self esteem.

3.12 It was clear that schools alone could not provide all the remedies and that successful schools were those which had a close relationship with the parents of their students. They encouraged the involvement of all parents, not just the parents of troublesome students, in the development, implementation and ongoing management of whole school discipline policies. Such policies provided a clear direction or statement of the school's view on violence and the consequences of it. They aimed to build self esteem, particularly amongst vulnerable students and they modelled non-punitive and non-violent ways of resolving conflict. It was suggested that parental involvement contributed to parental education, and encouraged their support and commitment to the principles of that policy.

Media and Entertainment Industries

3.13 The influence exerted on children by the media and the entertainment industry in general, was overwhelmingly identified in evidence as a contributor to the acceptance of, and use of, violence by children. Some evidence identified media and entertainment industry violence as a specific cause of school violence and suggested that some children were unable to differentiate between violence on the screen and appropriate behaviour in their day to day lives. The average number of hours children spent watching television, excluding video watching or watching taped shows, was quoted to the Committee as between two and a half and three and a half hours a day.

3.14 Evidence from the Australian Children's Television Action Committee stated that on average, by the time an Australian child was fourteen or sixteen years old he or she would have seen some eighteen thousand murders on television. They referred to three thousand studies which identified a connection between the impact of media violence and the instigation of later violence.

3.15 The clear view expressed to the Committee from a broad spectrum of submissions was that un-monitored television and video viewing was commonplace and had the effect of desensitising children. The influence of violence on young people, such as confrontation and aggression in films, television, popular music, games and sport, was seen as powerful and pervasive, perhaps acting as a trigger to perpetrate violence. The behaviour was reinforced when children dressed up and/or pretended to be their special hero, such as Batman, a Mutant Ninja Turtle or G.I.Joe. Teachers in particular identified the effect of programs which justified violence and portrayed demeaning attitudes as clearly identifiable in schools.⁹

3.16 For example, teachers referred to changed playground behaviours, such as kicking and punching by primary pupils, which coincided with the televising of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. On the other hand high school students advised the Committee that they saw films, television and video games as purely entertainment and could readily differentiate between entertainment and reality.

3.17 The Australian Institute of Criminology suggested that identifying a single influence as a cause of violence, such as television or the media, did not stand up to analysis.¹⁰

3.18 The Australian Council for Children's Films and Television stated:

We are not making the claim that mass media violence is the cause of violence in schools nor the cause of mounting violence in society. But we are saying it is a statistically significant and socially significant contributor to violence expressed by the young.¹¹

3.19 Many witnesses and submissions were concerned about the lack of balance and commitment by the media and entertainment industries to provide positive

messages. The use of poor language, the devaluing of young girls and women and the depiction of confrontation and aggression, acted to reinforce negative values, without offering any positive balance.

3.20 The media in Britain had been 'co-opted' to work in a positive way against crime prevention. The Express group of papers introduced a publication called *YX Youth Express* which was produced by student authors and editors and circulated to every school in the country once a term. It was widely read. It dealt with a whole range of issues of interest to young people, particularly crime and crime prevention.¹²

3.21 Television series, such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, were identified as programs providing questionable role models for children developing social values and models for future behaviour. These programs were watched by children from six upwards. As G classified programs they did not require parental supervision, and while not explicitly violent, modelled belligerent attitudes, and showed little respect for the important values which children were learning. To counter the effects of programs such as these, the Council argued for two levels of G rated programs, one for adolescents and one for six to twelve year old children. The Council argued that:

...there is a need for a global look at the impact of media, not simply at the amount of violence in particular programs: I do not think that meets the real issue, which is the sort of values and expectations that children develop about the nature of violence in this society. I believe there is a real question to be raised about the overall diet of the mass media, not so much about particular programs.¹³

3.22 Inconsistencies relating to R ratings were highlighted. The law currently disallowed a child over two accompanying a parent to a drive-in or theatre to see an R-rated movie, but parents hired the same video and showed it to children. The Australian Council for Children's Films and Television called for recognition of the harmful effects of R rated material on children. The Council claimed that:

The recommendations that came out of (the Senate inquiry into the video tape industry) made one glaring conceptual error: while they made it illegal for a person to show an R-rated or X-rated video to children, they exempted parents, and I believe that is conceptually wrong...what is clear is that parents are filtering out the sexuality pretty effectively, what they are not filtering out is the violence.¹⁴

3.23 Other evidence called for the removal of R rated video material entirely from home video outlets.

3.24 Advertising and television sporting promotions were also criticised. One submission identified advertisements which 'valued' certain types of behaviour or

appearance - the pretty girl, the thin girl, the bully, the bloke at the Rugby - as having the capacity to create anger and frustration in those who did not fit the 'valued' picture. The inclusion of violent acts in the promotion of sporting events served to reinforce in children's minds that such behaviour was appropriate because sports heroes were modelling the behaviour.

3.25 There was support for the Film and Literature Classification Board guidelines and it was agreed that an active campaign to promote and explain its classification guidelines and its value to parents could encourage its use. Principals also believed that schools had a role in promoting the merits of the classification system to both students and parents. Parents were identified as needing to exercise more control over children's viewing of television, films, videos and use of video games. Some parents needed to be empowered to exercise more control and support through national campaigns which promoted the value and merits of the classification system, which distributed information, and which identified mass media violence as a public health issue.

3.26 With the likelihood of between two hundred and five hundred channels available in Australia soon through satellite coverage, education and persuasion were seen as the only effective and realistic methods of filtering out violence.¹⁵

3.27 The Committee was told that account should be taken of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 17, of the convention, Mass Media and Appropriate Information, states:

...states are to encourage the mass media to disseminate material of social and cultural benefit to children, and to have particular regard to children from indigenous and minority groups. They are to encourage the protection of children from harmful material.

3.28 The Committee believes that the media and entertainment industries have a clear responsibility to examine the use of violent, aggressive and inappropriate behaviours and to promote balance, non-violent values and behaviour. Increased recognition by these industries, the community and parents, of the social impact of mass media violence on the young, is imperative to counter the current pervasive media view that violence is acceptable and a normal part of life.

3.29 The Committee recommends that:

the Minister for Communications and the Arts commission a national research project to examine the effects of television, video, film and video games on the learning outcomes and behaviour of Australian children.

School Structures

3.30 The challenge for schools was to provide a curriculum which offered opportunities for success to all students. The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia suggested that in this regard Independent schools provided a good example:

...I think the broad curriculum that we have in our schools, where the school's activities go far beyond the academic curriculum, give many more opportunities for students to be successful and therefore not to feel they need to establish their dominance in anti-social ways.¹⁶

3.31 Increased student retention rates had brought new pressures on schools. Many of these students would have previously left school at the completion of Year 10. Several submissions identified the lack of, or limited amount of, vocational training available in most secondary schools to meet the needs of students who did not have an interest in academic achievement, and who could benefit from training to enhance their opportunity for employment.

3.32 The AEU noted that the curriculum in the later years of schooling did not adequately reflect the change in the student population, and curriculum reform was resisted particularly by 'powerful conservative higher education lobbies'.¹⁷ This view was also held by many teachers who spoke to the Committee during the course of the inquiry.¹⁸

3.33 Curriculum or methodology failed to meet the needs of a changed student population and failed to prepare students adequately for a life after school. Some students believed the chances of not getting a job were high and a consequent cycle of depression and anti-social behaviour followed.

3.34 It was claimed that access to Austudy benefits had seen a number of poorly motivated students remaining at school. One contributory cause to classroom disruption was that aspect of the Austudy scheme which had attendance as its only criterion for payment. It was argued that some students benefiting from Austudy lacked a commitment both to their studies and the school.¹⁹ The Committee notes however that these difficulties might be better addressed by the development of curriculum more relevant to the students' needs.

3.35 The Committee recommends that:

the Minister for Employment, Education and Training review the attendance and performance eligibility criteria for Austudy for students in Years 11 and 12.

3.36 The Department of Employment, Education and Training believed that school organisation and structures were significant factors in contributing to a

culture where violence was subtly sanctioned or accepted as inevitable. Structures emphasising the power and authority exercised by principals who were generally male, added to the difficulties of female teachers to control the behaviour of male students in particular, who did not see female teachers as legitimately exercising authority and power.²⁰

3.37 The AEU believed that mandatory reporting of school violence, based on agreed definitions and not identifying either individuals or schools, may be appropriate. Many principals were reluctant to reveal the details of specific incidents or the extent of school violence within their schools. An overriding consideration for some principals was the likelihood of sensationalised media reporting of school violence, and the consequent stigma and poor reputation for schools.²¹

3.38 There was a widespread belief that the size of the school impacted on behaviour. Evidence suggested factors of overcrowding both on a school site and in classrooms led to 'jostling' and 'elbowing', which in turn led to more aggressive behaviour. One secondary college in Victoria stated that suspension figures indicated that student violence had increased as the college's student numbers rose. This was attributable to increased congestion in locker bays and quadrangles, with consequent rough behaviour and disputes.²² A survey of South Australian schools showed that the numbers of schools reporting assaults increased with school size.²³

3.39 It was also widely held that educational outcomes were affected by class size. Equity in education and the participation of all students in learning, required personal interaction between individual students and teacher. Teachers and the unions argued that current class sizes generally failed to provide that opportunity. The AEU stated that:

We are not arguing that every class or every situation a child would find themselves in ought to be somewhere in the vicinity of ten to twenty students. We are arguing that for a proportion of time - the time that is spent on core learning - there ought to be the capacity for teachers to understand the very nature of the approach and the successes and failures that a student feels in the context of what we know is the knowledge era and, therefore, an explosion of knowledge. I think this is a new factor.²⁴

3.40 The AEU believed that whilst it was difficult to quantify any direct relationship between indiscipline, violence and class size:

...it is significant that in surveys both here and overseas class size consistently emerges as the single most important factor which teachers believe will improve the situation.²⁵

3.41 The Committee in its report, *The Literacy Challenge* argued for innovative structures which would give students access to specialist staff and enable teachers

to address the needs of individual students. It recommended that the Commonwealth Government finance a pilot research program to investigate the effects of staffing arrangements which did not reduce class size, but allowed for specialisation and the provision of non-teaching time.

3.42 A small number of submissions linked Australia's high youth suicide rate to a lack of success and aspects of school violence such as bullying and low self esteem. The Committee was disturbed by a report of a suicide of a young male. The suicide was linked to prolonged physical harassment and verbal abuse and resultant low self esteem during his secondary schooling at a private school. Repeated attempts by the parents to have the school address the problem, resulted in little action by the school.²⁶ The case raises many questions for the Committee, not the least of which is the apparent failure of a pastoral care system, which evidence stated was promoted as being able to respond to the needs of individual students.

3.43 The Committee was advised that the use of corporal punishment as a method of student control had largely been phased out with the introduction of school discipline policies which emphasised the supportive school environment. These policies did not focus on children's individual behaviour, but rather on the whole school community as the environment in which that behaviour occurs. They modelled non-punitive, non-violent ways of resolving conflict as an alternative to aggressive behaviour.

3.44 The Committee was told that the behaviour and attitudes of a few teachers contributed to violence, aggression and abuse. In a survey conducted into student behaviour at the Anglican Church Grammar School in Brisbane, the Committee was told that teachers were both surprised and horrified at student perceptions that many of the teachers were bullying, particularly through the use of sarcasm.²⁷ The Department of Employment Education and Training stated:

Consultations and research in the field indicate that many teachers do not recognise violence as a serious problem, think their part of the curriculum has no bearing on the issue and do not see how their own behaviours can foster violence, for example, some methods of class and school management, including physical and verbal violence.²⁸

Chapter 3 - Endnotes

- 1 National Committee on Violence, *Violence: Directions for Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology, 1990.
- 2 Discussions, Boys' Town, Engadine, Sydney.
- 3 Discussions, Upway Schools, Upway, Melbourne.
- 4 Littlefield, L, La Trobe University, *Transcript*, p. 580.
- 5 Olweus, D, Bully/Victim Problems Among Schoolchildren: Basic Facts and Effects of a School Based Intervention Program, in *The Development and Treatment of Childhood Aggression*, eds Pepler, D, & Rubin, K, Lawrence, Earlbaum, 1991.
- 6 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Our Homeless Children*, AGPS, 1989.
- 7 National Committee on Violence, op.cit.
- 8 Findon High School, Findon, Adelaide, *Submission*.
- 9 Australian Children's Television Action Committee, *Submission*.
- 10 Australian Institute of Criminology, *Transcript*, p. 401.
- 11 Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, *Transcript*, p. 293.
- 12 Australian Institute of Criminology, op.cit., p. 405.
- 13 Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, op.cit., p. 297.
- 14 *ibid.*, p. 298.
- 15 Australian Institute of Criminology, op.cit., p. 412.
- 16 Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Transcript*, p. 486.
- 17 Australian Education Union, *Submission*.
- 18 Discussions, Upway Schools, Upway, Melbourne.
- 19 Discussions, Public Meeting, Bundaberg.
- 20 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Submission*.
- 21 Australian Education Union, op.cit.
- 22 Newcomb Secondary College, *Submission*.
- 23 Adey, K, Oswald, M, & Johnson, B, *Discipline in Schools - A Survey of Teachers, Surveys No 1 and 2*, University of South Australia, 1991.
- 24 Australian Education Union, *Transcript*, p. 431.
- 25 Australian Education Union, *Submission*.
- 26 Confidential Submission.
- 27 Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, op.cit., p. 53.
- 28 Department of Employment, Education and Training, op.cit.

CHAPTER 4

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE

Data Collection

4.1 There is a lack of data which allows an accurate assessment to be made of the nature and extent of school violence. Results of a major study conducted in South Australia into student behaviour, together with anecdotal evidence of levels of school violence gathered during the inquiry, suggested that there was a significant problem in the area of school bullying, including sexual harassment.

4.2 The Committee believes that it is important that qualitative and quantitative data on school violence is collected on a national basis. Commonwealth funds directed at gaining a national understanding of the levels and effects of school violence will allow for the development and evaluation of programs to address inappropriate behaviour. Existing Australian research efforts have shed significant light on school violence. The work however has not been extensive. A well designed and coordinated national survey will provide comprehensive and comparable data, allowing the development of effective preventative measures.

4.3 A national data collection would need to have, as a first step, an agreed definition of school violence. The collection should not be used to identify individuals or schools, or States and Territories, in a way that stigmatises or draws attention to particular problems.

4.4 Accordingly the Committee recommends that:

- the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in consultation with State and Territory Ministers for Education, finance the development of a national school violence data collection system.**

Program Evaluation

4.5 The Committee notes the successes in addressing school violence in those schools which have adopted a whole school approach to behaviour. Schools which involved parents, students and teachers in the development and implementation of behaviour policies and supporting programs, and which looked to the community for support, appeared to experience the greatest success in managing student behaviour.

4.6 The Committee understands however that there are many and varied programs directed at students, parents and teachers to address school violence. The information on the effectiveness of these programs is largely anecdotal. The Committee agrees with the Australian Institute of Criminology that these programs

intervene in people's lives and cost money, often public money, and are competing for limited education funds. It is therefore essential that programs are evaluated and that only the best are used.¹

4.7 The Committee recommends that:

- . the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in consultation with State and Territory Ministers for Education, fund the evaluation of successful approaches adopted by schools to determine best practice; and
- . the results of that evaluation be published and disseminated.

Parental Programs

4.8 Notwithstanding the need to develop a school environment where the likelihood of violence is minimal, specific programs are required to address violent behaviour when it does or has the potential to occur. The Committee examined a number of these and they are discussed below. They are included as examples of the types of programs available but do not represent all successful programs.

4.9 Parents and families are the greatest influence on their children's behaviour. Schools and parents therefore must develop a partnership for developing appropriate behaviour in students.

4.10 In developing a whole school approach to discipline, many schools from the outset involved parents in the development of that policy. For some it went further and they become a partner to a contract at a student's commencement in a new school. Such a contract set out the school's expectation of the child's behaviour and provided a clear indication to parents and student of the school's behaviour policies.

4.11 It was argued that many parents needed support in the onerous role of parenting. Children were very aware of their 'rights', leaving parents struggling to exercise any control over their children. This, added to confusion over the best methods of disciplining children, left many parents powerless. There were reports of parents who were not prepared to look at their child's behaviour problems, who failed to respond to the school's request for interviews, or who did not attend parent/teacher nights. There were others that were unaware that their own behaviour effects the way their children behave.

4.12 Many schools and communities encouraged the concept of positive parenting through the conduct of parenting courses. Parenting programs such as parent effectiveness training helped to build parents self esteem so that they could feel more in control of their family situation. They also helped parents to deal with family conflict. Parent management training assisted parents of a seriously

aggressive child to establish rules, to deliver consistent punishment and to provide positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviour.

4.13 Parenting programs were likely to have the highest participation and greatest benefit if they were seen by parents as non-threatening and not reflecting on their abilities as parents. The Committee supports parenting programs which encourage shared parenting and which allow for the participation of both parents. In particular, the Committee is concerned that fathers are often not participants in such programs.

4.14 Children with severe behavioural problems required prolonged and professional intervention and support. A program conducted in Victoria by Melbourne Citymission, in conjunction with La Trobe University, called *Exploring Together*, offered an opportunity for students, parents and the school to join together in a program where new behaviour skills were learned and reinforced in children who were at risk of aggressive behaviour, before that behaviour became entrenched.

4.15 The coordinator of the *Exploring Together* program stated that:

We know from research that if children are seriously aggressive at age eight and that becomes a pattern of interacting, unless there is some intervention, there is quite a substantial likelihood that they will go on to become more aggressive and move into juvenile delinquency.²

4.16 The program also assisted with the passive and withdrawn behaviours of the bullies' 'victims'. The program recognised it was not possible to treat only the child. Other factors and influences within the family, such as marital problems, lack of parenting skills and absent fathers, impacted on the child's behaviour.

4.17 In a short-term group co-operative learning program, which was ten weeks long, children and parents met in separate groups, finally combining to address the future and how they would jointly put these newly learned forms of behaviour management into practice. Children were taught social skills, how to get on with their peer group and how to increase their self esteem. Parents were taught behaviour management, and improved communication and understanding in the family and their own needs such as marital problems and depression were dealt with. The children's teachers and other members of the family or close friends who supported the family were also involved.

4.18 The program which had been running three years reported a preliminary finding of a seventy-four per cent improvement in aggression - a quite high result, considering the program was designed to assist those children who ran the risk of becoming juvenile delinquents. The program had its greatest effect when schools grouped together to run the program.

4.19 Limited funds of \$120 000 over three years were used to run this pilot. In that time 154 children and their families completed the ten week program and 79 leaders, 48 of whom were teachers in schools were trained, with 43 agencies (24 of them different schools) involved in running the program. While the cost may appear high, should these 154 children find their way into the prison system, it would on average, represent a cost to the community of nearly \$7 million to maintain them for a year.

4.20 Melbourne Citymission stated that to increase the access of many more schools and many more families into this type of program would reduce the number of children seeking the organisation's support.³

4.21 The Committee recommends that:

**the Minister for Human Services and Health,
during the International Year of the Family,
establish, in each State and Territory, pilot
programs on positive parenting.**

Bullying

4.22 Australian research, which confirmed findings overseas, identified that schools which had a low incidence of bullying were those schools where staff were involved in students' lives, particularly extra curricular activities. These schools also identified bullying as an issue, not simply as an harassment policy, but actually identified and described it. The schools had developed programs which directly addressed incidents of bullying. Importantly the programs were generally developed in conjunction with parents, staff and students.⁴

4.23 The creation of a school (and ideally, also home) environment which was characterised by warmth, positive interest, and involvement from adults on the one hand, and firm limits to unacceptable behaviour on the other, was an important component of intervention programs. In cases of violations of limits and rules, non-hostile, non-physical sanctions needed to be consistently applied. A certain degree of monitoring and surveillance of these students' activities in and out of school was required. Intervention programs also required adults to act in an authoritative manner.⁵

4.24 A whole school approach included pupils who were neither bullies nor victims. A feature of the programs was that students were encouraged to report incidents of bullying and teaching staff took these reports seriously.

Programs for Boys

4.25 The Queensland Department of Education stated that:

The construction of gender which creates dualistic and oppositional notions of masculinity and femininity, and which endorses violence as part of the notion of masculinity, is of fundamental importance in tackling issues of violence.⁶

4.26 The current gender equity programs in schools do not address the needs of boys. The NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Association advised that:

...a lot of what happens in schools under the name of gender equity would be more accurately termed affirmative action for girls...we should give it its proper name...if there is a huge effort in schools to further the choices girls can make and to free them from the constraints of gender stereotypes while not much is being done for boys...the frustrations on the part of the boys will get worse and violence will increase because of that neglect.⁷

4.27 The Committee is aware of several programs addressing male behaviour, only one of which is outlined here. *Boys and Relationships* was a school based program for pre-adolescent boys developed collaboratively by a group of agencies in Adelaide. The Committee supports the inter-agency approach to problem solving, and the program's approach to breaking down the stereotypical imaging of maleness. However, the Committee notes that the program is not about turning 'boys into girls'. The integrated approach included the training of teachers in program delivery, the possibilities to involve parents (particularly fathers), and the development of a package which would allow for dissemination of the program throughout the State and possibly Australia. Early program evaluation appeared positive, but like most programs outlined to the Committee, it required long term evaluation.⁸

4.28 Policies and programs have been developed which have liberated or attempted to liberate females from stereotypical 'female' roles. The Committee believes that all education systems should adopt, as a matter of urgency, education strategies which allow both boys and girls to fulfil their potential and which will equip them to make appropriate decisions in times of fear, stress and failure.

Peer Support

4.29 Vertical home rooms, comprising equal numbers of students across all high school years, was identified as a successful model for providing students with support. It had the effect of breaking up peer groups capable of violent behaviour and encouraged older students to take responsibility for the younger members of the home room.⁹

4.30 The Peer Support Program is run by the Peer Support Foundation, which is a small non-profit charitable organisation. It is a program for primary and secondary students based on the understanding that individuals are influenced by peers. Teachers are trained to train senior students in both secondary and primary schools to become group leaders, who then provide a means of support for junior students.

4.31 The Committee was advised that participating schools enjoyed a dramatic change in culture and reduction in anti-social behaviour, particularly bullying and violence.¹⁰

Coordination of Services

4.32 Overwhelmingly, the evidence suggested that to counter violence in schools, a coordinated approach between families, schools and their communities was required. Areas of community involvement could vary from school to school, but organisations such as the police, departments of community services, youth clubs, churches, cultural groups, welfare agencies, and local councils should be targeted in seeking cooperation and support for a school behaviour policy. Community plans needed to be developed which complemented and supported those of schools.

4.33 It was important for the community to reinforce positive messages rather than dwell on the negative aspects of society which were so often reflected in the press and media and through the entertainment industry. Principals applauded the work of many local councils in providing opportunities for young people to be with each other in situations that look toward positive things - positive living, positive relationships, and positive actions.

4.34 An example of inter-agency cooperation, which had been developed in recent years, was the involvement of police in schools. This involvement ranged from ad hoc police visits, to the full time presence of a police officer in the school. In Victoria there were over eighty police working full time in Victorian schools. The police provided role models by demonstrating behaviours and attitudes consistent with a non-violent approach to problem solving and other situations. Queensland had an 'Adopt a Cop' program by which police officers became closely identified with a school community. In the Northern Territory a police officer is permanently located at each high school. The officers had been accepted by the school communities and provided direct assistance to the school and individual students on a range of matters.

4.35 The need to deliver a variety of services to dispersed populations in Australia suggests that schools could provide an important point of focus in service provision. The Queensland Department of Education for instance, told the Committee that:

...with the growing concept of the supportive school environment
we are also looking at schools as a place to provide resources to

the parents and the community that makes contact with the schools. We are not looking at schools as simply a place where students go.¹¹

4.36 The Committee believes this may be an effective and efficient way of delivering services which at present are dispersed across many agencies and programs. It has the added advantage of providing coordinated support to students and families in need.

4.37 In South Australia there was extensive inter-agency cooperation operating at a local level. The South Australian Department of Education, Employment and Training advised that:

We have a concerted inter-agency approach to students, particularly the students with social and behavioural difficulties...a team of people will meet regularly once a week and there will be family and community services, child adolescent mental health service, child and family health service, education department, even police sometimes...They will talk about the student with particular needs and how to support the family in those circumstances, so everyone is applying their particular expertise...¹²

4.38 The Victorian Community Council Against Violence works towards creating safer communities and provides schools experiencing violence with strategies to prevent the violence. The Council identified as important, a shift away from a situation where schools tended to deal with school violence in-house, to increasingly, involving other agencies. The Council promoted a comprehensive approach involving agency coordination, issue integration and links between schools and their communities, incorporating them into all major policy and program decisions at all levels of Government and the community. The aim was to prevent uncoordinated and conflicting responses from a multiplicity of agencies and to rationalise and consolidate, at a local community level, resources and programs addressing violence. The Council believed that additional resources to address school violence were not necessarily required, but rather better use needed to be made of available resources in a coordinated manner, with decisions and innovative solutions taken at a local level.¹³

4.39 The NSW Child Protection Council stated that the community must give stronger support to school programs and provide resources to assist schools in their plans to reduce violence in both the short and long term. Services for young people were being disbanded. Young people had been moved from institutions such as juvenile detention centres, or homes for the intellectually or physically disabled, and integrated into the mainstream schools. Appropriate programs and sufficient resources needed to be provided to schools to ensure that integration took place without difficulties for the students. The Council argued that where community activities, included those which affected young people, such as domestic violence, and

violent video games, films and sport which glorify or sanction violence, community strategies must be developed to deal with these.¹⁴

4.40 While the majority of the evidence supported the view that agencies working to support children and families needed to work with schools and coordinate their approach, there was other evidence which suggested that inter-agency facilities were so overtaxed as to be virtually inaccessible. The Committee received evidence that the workload of the inter-agency referral manager was so overwhelming in dealing with young adolescents, that although parents were willing to have a third party involved, workloads did not permit it.

4.41 It appeared that a lack of an agreed definition of violence across agencies frustrated the work of some professionals. In camera evidence highlighted instances where school counsellors had made referrals about students at risk which were not accepted. It appeared that some agencies accepted levels of anti-social behaviour which would not have been tolerated a few years ago.¹⁵

4.42 The School Psychologists Australia (Inc.) suggested that inter-agency cooperation in New South Wales was limited, and existed only if individual counsellors developed good relationships within agencies. In the case of the Department of Community Services it was stated that its method of service delivery was inadequate. A number of agencies could be involved with the one student and the family, compounding the problem, as no one had ultimate responsibility.

4.43 One witness highlighted the case of one violent student in New South Wales who was:

...referred to the Department of Community Services, to the Department of Health, the sexual assault counsellor, to Redbank - a specialist health agency - and to school counsellors. About seven agencies have been involved but no one person or agency has taken responsibility for this case...There is no one coordinating person.¹⁶

4.44 The NSW Teachers' Federation believed that the Department of School Education programs were comprehensively coordinated packages but advised that:

When you compare that to organisations like DOCS, the Department of Community Services, and the bits that are in the health department and the bits that are in this department and that department, what you have got over there is scrambled eggs. The schools can hardly even tap into the so-called community resources because it is so difficult to track them down in the first place.¹⁷

4.45 The uncoordinated approach seems common to most systems. The Committee was advised in Victoria of thirteen professionals dealing with one

child¹⁸, and the existence of forty programs operating simultaneously to address youth behaviour.¹⁹

4.46 During its discussions and visits, the Committee saw evidence of the successes in behaviour management enjoyed by schools who were well supported by community agencies. The Committee is convinced that a coordinated approach to students and their families is an effective use of scarce resources in the education and welfare sectors.

4.47 The Committee recommends that:

the Prime Minister request the Premiers and Chief Ministers to examine the manner in which Government services are delivered to students and families requiring support from more than one agency.

Specialist Support Staff and Early Intervention

4.48 It was generally agreed that school counsellors or guidance officers were an important resource to schools in dealing with school violence. The Committee was told that insufficient counsellors were present in schools to deal with the workload. Consequently, in many situations, children were not adequately assisted *in their time of need. In times of school cutbacks, the Committee learned that some counsellors were having to take on additional teaching responsibilities, thus reducing further the opportunity to provide counselling services.*

4.49 It was difficult for the Committee to determine the number of counsellors working in the public education system, who were actually in schools providing students, teachers and families with the necessary expert support. The School Psychologists Australia (Inc.) suggested that theoretically, in the New South Wales public school sector, there was one counsellor to 1,543 students. The reality, however, was quite different. Special classes and special schools attracted a betterment in view of the number of disordered and disabled students, and so counsellors working in those situations worked at a far lower ratio. Counsellor positions were also reduced at a regional level to fill other specialist positions, and particularly to cope with administrative demands. One counsellor claimed that:

...out of my counsellors, one's district is 2,400 and the smallest district is 1,660 and the counsellor who has 1,660 has 110 moderately and severely disabled students as well that she has to service. The one with 1,660 has eight support classes for mild or moderately intellectually delayed students.²⁰

4.50 There is no full time counsellor at any New South Wales high school.²¹ School Psychologists of Australia stated that in the past twenty years, there had been no additional counsellor positions created in New South Wales, although in

that time special education, and its consequent need for counsellors, had grown substantially. The counsellor base had therefore been significantly eroded.

4.51 School counsellors provide support in several ways:

- . by providing a psychological counselling service directly accessible to students and their parents at school;
- . by providing teacher inservice training in schools;
- . by maintaining links with key Government bodies and private organisations offering specialised student services, giving access and information to students and families; and
- . by keeping informed of Education Department and inter-Departmental policies in order to support students and their families.

4.52 The Committee was advised that school psychologists were trained in both education and psychology. This dual training put them in a unique position to work with the school to assist students. One submission identified the need for sensitive school personnel to be able to identify those situations where students were exposed to violence in the home so that appropriate support could be provided in the school. Increased understanding of the students' situation, with appropriate support structures, could enable students to remain in mainstream education.²² School counsellors were generally registered in both professions, although the qualifications for appointment to Government school psychological services varied from State to State.

4.53 A spokesperson for the Queensland Branch of the Australian Psychological Society, identified people working as school psychologists in Queensland as generally requiring a much higher level of training. That organisation believed that the development of effective school support services required school counsellors undertaking psychological work, to be trained as psychologists.²³

4.54 Principals stressed the need for teachers to be able to identify symptoms in students at risk of school violence. Teacher training, inservice courses, specialist staff such as counsellors, were all strategies which needed to be used to maximise prevention and treatment for at risk students. A number of principals from Independent schools suggested that most Independent schools would have, as a minimum, one counsellor for every five hundred students, in addition to other specialist staff, such as career counsellors. A New South Wales report also recommended the level of counsellor staffing in New South Wales be increased to one counsellor per five hundred students and that counsellors be appointed differentially to areas of special need, particularly in relation to school discipline issues, and to the needs of children with learning difficulties and disabilities.²⁴ The Committee received other evidence that, to be effective, two counsellors to each five hundred students was an optimum number.

4.55 It was argued that without a sufficient counsellor base, when faced with the need for assistance, many families were forced to seek support from community based agencies which did not have the resources or expertise to provide assistance. Without early intervention, the behaviour of these children became far more difficult

and expensive. It was also generally agreed that if sufficient counsellors were not provided the stress on teachers increased as they generally did not have the necessary specialised training.

4.56 School Psychologists Australia (Inc) spoke of violent children often being the victims of violence:

If we cannot actually intervene early, then we have nine and ten year old children who are almost amoral, they are so remorseless in their violence.²⁵

4.57 As well as working with individual students, school counsellors had an equally important role working with the whole school community to develop school policies which addressed behaviour and in developing programs to support parents, teachers and students in implementing those policies.

4.58 One submission stated that often school based staff did not have the time or expertise to provide a coordinating link with the community or did not see it as their role. Overseas in the United Kingdom and Canada, this key and emerging role was increasingly being undertaken by trained youth and child care workers. Such workers did not replace teachers but rather provided a range of ancillary and support functions for teachers, the students and their families and initiated broad ranging community contacts on behalf of the school and its students. The employment of such workers within schools played a key role in aggression management and prevention within schools and provided much needed support for teachers and school counsellors.²⁶

4.59 The Committee recognises the unique position of school counsellors to work in both a preventative and remedial way in the area of school violence. Their experience both as teachers and counsellors provides an important contribution when addressing issues of student behaviour.

4.60 The Committee does not believe that sufficient recognition is given to the important role of school counsellors. Classroom teachers do not necessarily have the training or the time necessary to deal with the more serious aspects of student behaviour, nor the expertise to develop policies and programs addressing issues of school discipline. It is therefore vital that a goal for all State education systems should be to provide one counsellor per five hundred students located at each State secondary school and something approaching the same ratio supporting a number of State primary schools. The Committee believes the Government school sector must be resourced at least at the levels considered a minimum requirement in the Independent school sector.

4.61 The majority of evidence suggested that inappropriate behaviours were identifiable in children as early as pre-school and kindergarten. One academic stressed the benefits of introducing early detection screening in pre-schools, identifying children with serious aggression in order that they and their families could benefit from early intervention programs. Evidence also referred to a strong

connection between academic failure, disruptiveness and attentional difficulties and the need for a second level of early detection in the first and second years of primary school to identify children experiencing difficulty with reading and learning.²⁷

4.62 However, not all behavioural problems are evident in the early years of schooling. Principals stated that because the major influences on inappropriate behaviour were outside the school, particularly in the family, changes in a child's behaviour could occur at any time, particularly during adolescence.²⁸ Accordingly effective strategies and programs to address violence in high school are important but the need for these programs would diminish with the introduction of proper early intervention strategies.

4.63 The Committee recommends that:

the Minister for Employment, Education and Training discuss with the State and Territory Ministers for Education the need for early intervention strategies to address violent and anti-social behaviour in students.

4.64 The Committee believes sufficient evidence exists to suggest that the task of changing a child's behaviour patterns after the age of eight requires significantly more resourcing, with reduced chances of success, than if the problem was tackled in the earliest schooling years. The Committee strongly supports the notion of prevention, to the extent that that can be achieved, rather than piecemeal solutions to school violence when childhood behaviours are more difficult to change.

4.65 The Committee's recommendation in its report *The Literacy Challenge* for increased funding to the primary sector, if accepted by the Government, will enable some of the additional resources to be directed to the employment of counsellors and the development of early intervention strategies.²⁹

4.66 Additional funding may be required for the secondary sector. However if existing programs and approaches were rationalised it is possible that counselling services could be provided within existing resources.

Teacher Training

4.67 Most teachers are managing student behaviour in the classroom because of their dedication, training and experience. The Committee accepts that some violent incidents cannot be prevented by teachers and the school environment. On the other hand, the Committee believes that classrooms and the school in general can be managed in a manner which will ensure that violence is an isolated and infrequent occurrence.

4.68 A number of witnesses advised that the area of behaviour management was probably one of the most difficult aspects which young teachers were required

to learn when they commenced teaching. The Committee received various views on the need for specific training, both preservice and inservice, in this area. Many witnesses, particularly teachers and teachers' unions, observed the preservice teacher training courses did not place a great deal of emphasis upon discipline and behaviour management. The Committee was told that while new teachers were highly qualified, they had little knowledge about dealing with disruptive or violent students.³⁰

4.69 One teacher educator advised that it was important to improve pre and inservice training of the teachers and stated that:

It may be surprising to the Committee to know that it is not generally accepted in the faculties of education that training teachers in the area of behaviour management should be part of the under graduate course.³¹

4.70 While some universities were offering specific courses and all offered components on human behaviour, there seemed to be a general view that training in this area should be an integral and on-going aspect of professional development. Most institutions considered that the training should be skill based. It advised that the priority of any inservice or preservice program to combat violence in schools required that most of the educational delivery needed to be skill based and be given adequate time for learning, rehearsal and practice. The school was the best place in which preservice teacher training in dealing with violence needed to take place.

4.71 One faculty of education advised that while it was essential for experienced teachers to be able to confront the realities of student violence, there could be good reasons to shield the learning teacher from early exposure to what can be the disheartening realisation.³² Another faculty warned against simplistic solutions and stated that:

...effective change in teacher education involves more than the inclusion of a number of topics.³³

4.72 Topics such as behaviour management have always been covered in teacher education programs, and one institution commented that the fact that these programs had not stopped the rising incidence of bullying and student violence was instructive in itself. It advised that simplistic solutions were inappropriate and indeed might well be a waste of public resources. Behaviour modification and conflict resolution were examples of such a simplistic solution.³⁴ Another institution stated that behaviour management was principally a curriculum and pedagogy issue. Successful behaviour management was more a result of teacher skills in educative communication and their enthusiasm for their work, than of special skills in behaviour modification.³⁵

4.73 Given that most institutions considered that the acquisition of relevant skills must be acquired in the school and was an ongoing aspect of professional development, the question of availability of inservice training arose. The Committee

noted in a previous report that it was essential that system wide inservice training programs be developed and that State education departments were responsible to ensure that inservice training was systemic and inherent in professional development.³⁶

4.74 A number of witnesses advised of the expense and difficulty in withdrawing teachers from schools in order for them to receive training in these aspects. One teachers' union believed that teacher professional development could be done either inservice or 'on the job' or both. A teacher educator stated that the idea of taking teachers out of schools and placing them somewhere for a semester was not really necessary. The approach that that institution had adopted was to work with schools on the premises.³⁷

4.75 The Committee accepts the view of most teacher training institutions that the skill of classroom management and providing an appropriate approach which would address and minimise violent behaviour, is best obtained in the school environment. States and Territories must ensure that ongoing professional development programs are available to all teachers.

4.76 The Committee noted in its previous report on learning difficulties that the training of teachers in special education had become more essential. States and Territories were integrating, in normal classrooms, students with various learning and behavioural difficulties. It was the Committee's view that all teachers needed training in special education to enable them to address special learning difficulties in whole class situations.³⁸ One university cautioned against requiring teachers to take courses in special education. It stated that the problem with making conflict management and behaviour resolution compulsory, was that upcoming teachers would no longer look at the management of normal children but those from varying non-normal social circumstances. It stated that:

...by singling out only the violent and abusive children this action seems to be more reactive than pro-active focusing more on the teacher than children.³⁹

4.77 The Committee disagrees and considers that the development of these special skills in teachers will give them the wide range of skills necessary for the classrooms of the 1990's and beyond.

Exclusion and Alternative Programs

4.78 The Students at Risk (STAR) component of the National Equity Program for Schools directly addresses violence in schools through targeted projects. The overall objective of the component was to identify those students most at risk of not completing secondary school and encouraged their continued participation by supporting a range of school based projects, at, or in connection with, selected Government and non-Government secondary schools.

4.79 It was clear to the Committee that 'expulsion' from a school was generally viewed by principals as the final step in a long and exhaustive process to remediate the student's behaviour. No decision on expulsion appeared to be taken lightly as it was likely to deny the student an opportunity for further school education.

4.80 All education systems had policies dealing with suspension to expulsion, but each policy varied in its steps of implementation.

4.81 South Australia's policies on the management of student behaviour and suspension, exclusion and expulsion, recognised that at times quick action needed to be taken to deal with unsatisfactory student behaviour. It introduced the concept of an inter-agency referral manager who could provide a third and impartial element to disputes over student behaviour, as well as providing for more efficient use of inter-agency assistance.

4.82 In South Australia, suspended students were required to sign a contract for re-entry to the school. If the contract was breached, the student could be excluded from the school for up to ten weeks on the authority of the principal. The policy demonstrated to the student that violent behaviour was not acceptable. It also demonstrated to other students in the school that violence was an unacceptable method of resolving a dispute, as well as affording them protection.

4.83 Evidence suggested these approaches had been generally welcomed, and had led to improved student behaviour. The policies could be better implemented with an increased number of inter-agency referral manager positions and additional places made available for suspended and excluded students.

4.84 New provisions in Victoria's school disciplinary policy gave principals, within limits set by the State, the right to suspend and expel students. Grounds for suspension and expulsion included the threat of violence by a student against teachers, students or school property, and harassing or discriminatory behaviour based on sex, race, religion or physical or mental disability - the more subtle forms of violent behaviour.

4.85 State education systems are required by law to be non-selective, and are required to offer places to those students expelled from Independent schools. The AEU called for consistency in exclusion policies and cautioned against allowing some schools to become 'elite' by passing on their problem students to schools with a greater social conscience.

4.86 One witness quantified the effect of poor student behaviour:

On a campus of six hundred children, there are thirty children who are identified as being persistently difficult and yet they take up between the principal, deputy and counsellor, an average of forty-five per cent of our time.⁴⁰

4.87 The AEU believed that the proportion of the school community which was highly disruptive was around three per cent of students, and that policies, resources and facilities needed to increase to deal more adequately with severely disruptive students. It argued that schools should not be run, and teaching and learning not determined, by a small proportion of the school population with behaviour problems.⁴¹

4.88 The costs associated with providing alternative places for disruptive students were high. During a visit to Boys' Town at Engadine in Sydney the Committee noted the high staff to student ratio of one staff member to six students. It seems as the behaviour worsens, the ratio becomes even higher. The Committee visited Oxley Detention Centre in Brisbane, a detention centre for young criminal offenders. The College had places for twenty detainees and had an establishment of over fifty staff.⁴²

4.89 The lack of sufficient and suitable places for students suspended or excluded from mainstream education for both the short and long term, was a concern raised with the Committee. It was argued that to exclude students from one school, and simply place them in another school for the period of their exclusion, was fundamentally flawed. They were not only not wanted at the other school, but also were not taught anything that might provide them with alternative strategies to perpetrating violence.

4.90 Evidence from Boys' Town at Engadine suggested that in New South Wales at least 'exclusion' was a limbo somewhere between long term suspension and expulsion, which was not documented in official statistics:

While there are official procedures for arranging and documenting exclusion, it is the experience of this agency that students/parents receive this message more implicitly and covertly and are discouraged from continuing with a search for an educational placement.⁴³

4.91 Evidence from Boys' Town also suggested that a large number of students who were victims of domestic violence could be maintained in mainstream schooling if school systems were more aware of what was occurring in households and introduced appropriate school support structures for those students. The evidence argued that when the student and his home situation was understood by a teacher, the teacher felt less personally threatened by the student's non-standard approaches and responses. They were then able to be more flexible in dealing with these students and to provide support structures for them.

4.92 The Committee is also convinced that if the senior curriculum was modified to make it more relevant to some students, anti social behaviour could be significantly reduced.

4.93 One alternative for young people who had fallen through the net of mainstream schooling and who were becoming caught up in the Juvenile Justice

system was offered by the Centre Education Program operating in Brisbane. Instead of having a list of rules and punishments, the Centre had principles and consequences which students and staff were required to maintain and aimed to provide a safe, stable and caring environment within which student needs were met. The Centre provided each student with an exit certificate and assisted them to enter TAFE courses or the workforce.⁴⁴

4.94 The Committee accepts that for the well being of the majority of students, expulsion and exclusion must remain an option for schools. The Committee believes, however, that all systems must develop appropriate alternative education programs to assist these children. To exclude students and offer no support is to condemn many of them to unemployment, social exclusion and the prison system, with its subsequent costs to the individual and to the community.

The Law

4.95 The role of the police in schools was generally recognised in evidence as making a positive contribution towards countering school violence. The most highly developed of the State schemes involving police in schools appeared to be in the Northern Territory where a police officer was appointed to each school and for all intents and purposes was a member of staff. The Australian Institute of Criminology will shortly evaluate this school based policing program as it is judged to have the greatest promise in addressing school violence.

4.96 One constant frustration of schools was that if a child offended, either within or external to the school, the penalty was often so mild that the students returned to school with almost hero status within the year. It was argued that penalties for violent student behaviour in the judicial system had to be strengthened so as to act as a deterrent. The system need to be seen to be acting against the perpetrator, not the victim, as current lenient sentencing tended to do. Schools also experienced considerable difficulty when an offender waiting for a case to be heard still attended school and re-offended in that time.

4.97 The Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology argued for the implementation of strategies which would reduce the number of young people in the criminal justice system. A program currently operating in Wagga Wagga, based on a New Zealand model, which brought together the extended families of young offenders, the victim and the police as facilitators and conciliators aimed to deal with the actions of young people, including violence, outside the justice system. Very high success rates were reported and the program, which aimed to bring home responsibility and accountability to young offenders and their families, and which took account of the victim, was favoured ahead of more traditional punishment methods.⁴⁵

4.98 The National Children's and Youth Law Centre suggested to the Committee that 'seeing a Judge for five or ten minutes, and being delivered a moral homily' was not an effective way of changing behaviour. The Centre also favoured

bringing the community, the police and the victim into confrontation with the child so he or she:

...gets it between the eyes from the person whose house has been burgled, or the person whose car has been converted. It is not just some judge that they can laugh at. It is not the police who they think of as their enemies.

It is called a community conference with the police, the victim and the parents who will have much more ongoing effect over that young person's behaviour.⁴⁶

4.99 It was also argued that the conditions applying to the provision of a summary protection order made them too difficult to obtain. It was recommended that temporary or short term summary protection orders, of say one month's duration, should be available to the police to implement while the judicial processes were 'grinding on'.

4.100 The general view expressed on legal processes was that victims should not be left powerless and vulnerable by a judicial system which failed to deal adequately with the perpetrator of the violence. Penalties needed to act as a deterrent to youth violence, and the legal processes needed to support the victims and their families.

4.101 Other matters raised with the Committee were:

- . an improvement in the legal protection afforded to teachers who had to restrain violent students;
- . the right of parents to be able to sue both teachers and students who bully;
- . the need for third parties such as teachers and principals who were witnesses to incidents involving students to be able to bring charges to bring the perpetrators to justice;
- . the refusal of the judiciary to conduct trials to deal with violent acts by youths, when evidence was circumstantial; and
- . the effects of drugs and alcohol in society and their effect on young people.

Funding

4.102 The Committee visited one school which, within the space of four years, was able to change from a violent and unsafe place, into a school where violence had decreased, pupils felt safe and learning outcomes had improved. These ends were achieved within the school's existing human and financial resources.⁴⁷ It was also found in research into bullying in Australia, that schools that had adopted active anti bullying policies which involved staff, parents and pupils, irrespective of how well or poorly resourced they were, reported low instances of bullying.⁴⁸

4.103 While the Committee notes that a great deal can be achieved without additional resources, the achievement of positive outcomes places often unreasonable pressures on teaching staff. In its previous report *The Literacy Challenge*, the

Committee recommended an increase in Commonwealth and State Government funding to the primary sector to the equivalent per student levels in the secondary sector. It was argued that the difference in funding between the sectors was largely historical and that the beginnings of education, the years which provided the foundations for further learning, required increased funding in order to provide those foundations. The current inquiry confirms the Committee's view that it is essential that primary schools receive increased resourcing. The Commonwealth Government is currently reviewing the levels of funding to the primary sector. All States, except Victoria, are participating in the review.

4.104 Through this inquiry, the Committee has come to the view that the provision of that increased funding to the primary sector would not only allow literacy to be addressed, but would also allow for the development and introduction of programs and strategies to address behaviour and socialisation issues. Intervention in primary schools would ensure that, over time, the need for resources to address violence in the secondary sector would decline. In the mean time a problem exists which needs to be addressed.

4.105 In Britain a youth crime action program which operated in hundreds of schools, and which encouraged young people to accept responsibility and to use their initiative to examine problems associated with violence, was sponsored, not by Government, but by a major insurance company.⁴⁹

4.106 The Committee also notes that the multiplicity of programs operating in both the primary and secondary sectors have never been properly evaluated. A number of witnesses reported that successful outcomes could be achieved within existing resources, if the programs were evaluated and rationalised.

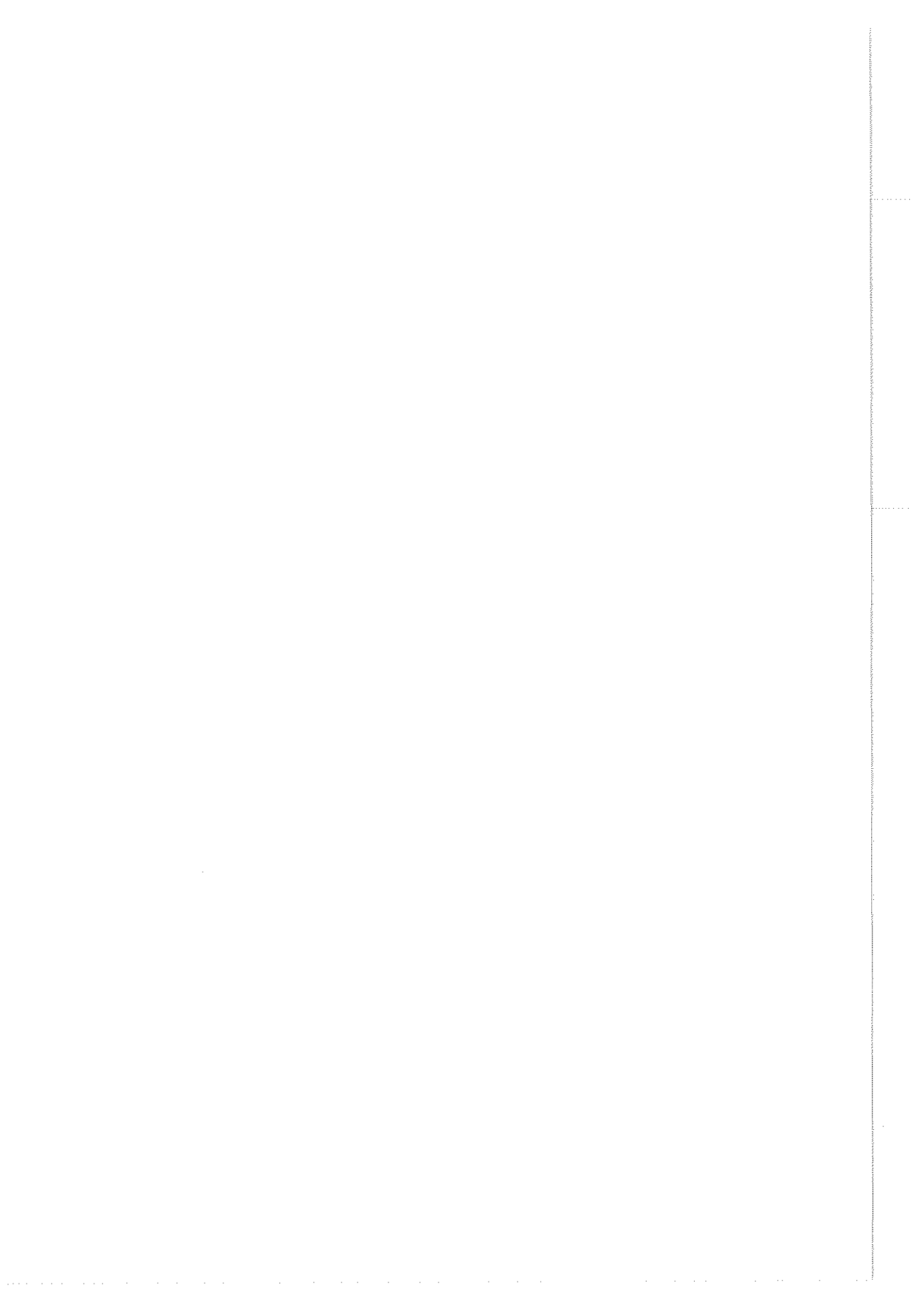
Mary Crawford
Chair

March 1994

Chapter 4 - Endnotes

- 1 Australian Institute of Criminology, *Transcript*, p. 404.
- 2 Littlefield, L, La Trobe University, *Transcript*, p. 557.
- 3 Melbourne Citymission, *Transcript*, p. 571.
- 4 Slee, P, Flinders University, *Transcript*, pp. 180-81.
- 5 Olweus, D, Bully/Victim Problems Among Schoolchildren: Basic Facts and Effects of a School Based Intervention Program, in *The Development and Treatment of Childhood Aggression*, eds Pepler, D, & Rubin, K, Lawrence, Earlbaum, 1991.
- 6 Department of Education, Queensland, *Submission*.
- 7 NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Association, *Transcript*, p. 610.
- 8 Tea Tree Gully Community Health Service, *Submission*.
- 9 Discussions, Upway Schools, Upway, Melbourne.
- 10 Peer Support Foundation Limited, *Submission*.
- 11 Department of Education, Queensland, *Transcript*, p. 12.
- 12 Department of Education, Employment and Training, South Australia, *Transcript*, p. 162.
- 13 Victorian Community Council Against Violence, *Transcript*, pp. 504-521.
- 14 NSW Child Protection Council, *Transcript*, pp. 619-633.
- 15 In camera evidence.
- 16 In camera evidence.
- 17 NSW Teachers' Federation, *Transcript*, p. 664.
- 18 Discussions, Upway Schools, Upway, Melbourne.
- 19 Victorian Community Council Against Violence, op.cit., p. 505.
- 20 In camera evidence.
- 21 NSW Teachers' Federation, op.cit., p. 659.
- 22 Boys' Town, *Submission*.
- 23 Sanders, M, *Transcript*, p. 97.
- 24 School Psychologists of Australia (Inc.), *Submission*.
- 25 In camera evidence.
- 26 Bowie, V, University of Western Sydney, *Submission*.
- 27 Sanders, M, op.cit., p. 92.
- 28 South Australian Secondary Principals Association, *Transcript*, p. 276.
- 29 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *The Literacy Challenge*, AGPS, 1993, p. 14.
- 30 Australian Education Union, ACT, *Transcript*, pp. 383-84.
- 31 Jenkin, J, University of Western Sydney, *Transcript*, p. 686.
- 32 University of Melbourne, *Submission*.
- 33 University of Newcastle, *Submission*.
- 34 Griffith University, *Submission*.
- 35 University of Canberra, *Submission*.
- 36 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, op.cit., p. 32.
- 37 Jenkin, J, op.cit., p. 690.
- 38 House of Representative Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *The Literacy Challenge*, op.cit., p. 29.
- 39 Griffith University, op.cit.

- 40 South Australian Primary Principals' Association, *Transcript*, p. 305.
- 41 Australian Education Union, *Submission*.
- 42 Discussions, Boys' Town, Engadine, and Oxley Detention Centre, Brisbane.
- 43 Boys' Town, *Submission*.
- 44 Discussions, Centre Education Project, Kingston, Brisbane.
- 45 Australian Institute of Criminology, *op.cit.*, p. 410.
- 46 National Children's and Youth Law Centre, *Transcript*, p. 595.
- 47 Discussions, Mayfield Primary School, Launceston.
- 48 Slee, P, *op.cit.*, p. 191.
- 49 Australian Institute of Criminology, *op.cit.*, p. 405.



APPENDIX 1

CONDUCT OF THE INQUIRY

On 13 May 1993 the Committee agreed to terms of reference referred to it by the Hon Ross Free MP, Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, relating to violence in schools.

In seeking the Committee's agreement to undertake the inquiry, the Minister acknowledged the Federal Government's concern about the increasing incidence of reported violence in schools. He outlined current Commonwealth Government action to address concerns identified in the Report of the National Committee on Violence, *Violence: Directions for Australia*, and other reports.

The Committee agreed to inquire into and report on:

- . any changes in the nature, level, and incidence of violence in schools;
- . the types of violence which occur in schools;
- . the factors influencing violence in schools, including community structures and attitudes;
- . the impact of violence in schools on student performance and educational outcomes for particular groups of students and for students in general;
- . policies and programs at Federal, State and local levels to address cultures of violence; and
- . the range, availability and provision of intervention strategies, particularly models of exemplary practice.

The Committee advertised its inquiry nationally, and received almost one hundred and twenty written submissions from every State and Territory. In addition it conducted public hearings and made visits and conducted inspections at relevant institutions in capital cities and regional areas of Australia.

The Committee also sought the views of State and Territory Governments, through the State Premiers. Only New South Wales refused the Committee's request for access to State Government officials. Access was refused on the basis that the Standing Committee on Social Issues of the Legislative Council of New South Wales was undertaking an inquiry into the issue of youth violence. The Premier of New South Wales, the Hon John Fahey MP, argued that while youth violence impacts on schools, as an issue, it is considerably broader and deeper and should be examined in that broader context.

The Premier also argued that matters relating to school education were primarily the responsibility of the States, and suggested that the resources of New South Wales officials would better be directed in assisting the Standing Committee on Social Issues in its deliberations.

The view of school education being a State responsibility was also shared by the Hon Norman Moore MLC, Minister for Education, Employment and Training in the Western Australian Government. The Minister recognised the significance of school violence and its unfortunate increase in Australian schools, and suggested that he and his departmental officers would be monitoring and examining the situation in order to develop appropriate strategies to counter violence.

It is unfortunate that the Committee was unable to visit New South Wales State high schools to view, at first hand, models of exemplary practice in the prevention of school violence.

The Commonwealth provides \$2.7 billion in specific purpose grants to the States for school education. The Commonwealth has a legitimate role in the development of national strategies and approaches to ensure that educational outcomes benefit the nation as a whole.

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF WITNESSES

Abbey, Mr N	Project Officer, Community Safety Task Force, Victorian Community Council Against Violence
Alcock, Mr A H	Occupational Health and Safety Officer, South Australian Institute of Teachers
Bennett, Mr D J	President, South Australian Association of State School Organisations Inc.
Bibby, Dr R M	President, NSW Institute for Educational Research
Biggins, Mrs B E	President, The Australian Council for Children's Films and Television
Binks-Williams, Mr J	Principal, Charles Campbell Secondary School, Member of the North-East Cluster of Schools
Boulden, Ms K	Education Officer, Department of Education (QLD)
Bowie, Mr V	Lecturer, Department of Youth Work and Justice Studies, University of Western Sydney
Breen, Mr B A	Private Individual
Brennan, Ms R E	President, NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations
Bull, Ms S C	Member, Policy Forum, Youth Action and Policy Association (NSW) Inc.
Burrow, Ms S L	Federal President, Australian Education Union
Carder, Mrs P M	Head of the Junior School, Fintona Girls' School, The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (VIC)
Carpenter, Mr K F	President, School Psychologists Australia (Inc.)
Castine, Ms K	Principal, Marryatville High School, Member of the North-East Cluster of Schools
Chappell, Professor D	Director, Australian Institute of Criminology
Chester, Ms L M	Industrial and Legal Section, Human Resources Branch, ACT Department of Education and Training
Clark, Ms M	Director, Curriculum and Gender Equity Policy Unit, Quality Schooling Branch, School and Curriculum Division, Department of Employment, Education and Training
Coats, Mrs J R	Deputy Principal, Primary School, Elizabeth South Schools
Cooke, Ms J M	Deputy Vice-President (Primary), Victorian No. 1 Branch, Federated Teachers' Union of Victoria, Australian Education Union
Coorey, Mr C	Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) Networks Officer, Youth Action and Policy Association (NSW) Inc.
Craze, Ms L W	Acting Manager, Crime and Violence Prevention Unit, Australian Institute of Criminology
Cross, Mr P A	President, NSW Teachers' Federation
Cupit, Mr C G	Consultant, The Australian Council for Children's Films and Television

Dillon, Mr G F	Project Officer, Interagency, Student Behaviour Management, Education Department, Department of Education, Employment and Training (SA)
Drury, Mr J K	Vice-President, South Australian Institute of Teachers
Duke, Ms A	Deputy President, ACT Branch, Australian Education Union
Ellis, Mr C	Member of National Standing Committee, The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (QLD)
Fazzalari, Ms L	Private Individual
Flaherty, Mr B P J	Immediate Past President (1991-92), Independent Parents and Friends Council of Queensland Inc.
Ford, Mr A J	Chairperson, NSW Child Protection Council
Ford, Ms M A	Project Officer, Education Department, Department of Education, Employment and Training (SA)
Fuller, Mrs C	Executive Officer, South Australian Association of State School Organisations Inc.
Gillies, Ms J H	Acting Director, Equity Directorate, Department of Education (QLD)
Grabau, Ms K F	Industrial Organiser, Victorian No. 1 Branch, Australian Education Union
Grunsell, Ms L E	Secretary, School Psychologists Australia (Inc.)
Hancock, Mrs J A	Chairman, The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (QLD)
Hanly, Mr D J	Vice-President, Queensland Secondary Principals Association
Healy, Mr R A	Parent Development Officer, Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Queensland
Hedges, Ms M	Director of Education (Schools), Education Department, Department of Education, Employment and Training (SA)
Hill, Mr A J	Headmaster, Melbourne Grammar School, The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (VIC)
Hill, Mrs J D	Member, The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (QLD)
Hinton, Ms F M	Assistant Secretary, Quality Schooling Branch, Department of Employment, Education and Training
Holmes, Mr N D	Member, South Australian Institute of Teachers
Howes, Ms A	Staff Welfare Officer, Human Resources Branch, ACT Department of Education and Training
Hughes, Mr J	Media Officer, NSW Teachers' Federation
Hunt, Mr G P	Psychologist, South Australian Health Commission, Tea Tree Gully Community Health Service
James, Mrs J	Member, The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (QLD)
Jenkin, Mrs J	Lecturer, University of Western Sydney
Johnson, Mr W J	Executive Officer, NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations
Jones, Mr G M	Private Individual
Kidman, Ms S E	Education Officer, Department of Education (QLD)

Kindler, Mrs M J	Executive Secretary, South Australian Association of State School Organisations Inc.
Knudsen, Mr S A M	Assistant Secretary, Queensland Teachers' Union
Koszegi, Mr B J	Social Worker, South Australian Health Commission, Tea Tree Gully Community Health Service
Linke, Mrs P	Consultant, The Australian Council for Children's Films and Television
Littlefield, Dr L K	Lecturer, Clinical Psychologist, La Trobe University
Ludbrook, Mr R	Director, National Children's and Youth Law Centre
Macdonald, Mr H A	Deputy Executive Officer, The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (VIC)
MacGregor, Ms F	Liaison Officer, ACT Branch, Australian Education Union
McMillan, Ms S H	Member, South Australian Secondary Principals Association
Main, Ms N A	Research-Project Officer, Crime and Violence Prevention Unit, Australian Institute of Criminology
Marsden, Mr A G	Project Worker, Youth Action and Policy Association (NSW) Inc.
Mason, Ms C A	Director, Women's Policy Unit and Women's Adviser to the Premier, Office of the Cabinet (QLD)
Mavor, Dr I G	Principal Policy Officer, Health and Personal Development, Studies Directorate, Department of Education (QLD)
Message, Mr R J	Manager, School Operations, Quality Programs Division, Directorate of School Education (VIC)
Morris, Mr I D	Country Vice President, NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations
Murray, Mr S P	Vice Chairperson, Youth Action and Policy Association (NSW) Inc.
Nicholls, Mr R	The Australian Council for Children's Films and Television and Assistant Secretary, South Australian Primary Principals Association
O'Brien, Mr D W	Committee Member, School Psychologists Australia (Inc.)
O'Donohue, Mr J M	President, Queensland Association of State School Principals
Paul, Mr P J	President, Victorian Primary Principals' Association
Pickering, Mrs M S	Committee Member, School Psychologists Australia (Inc.)
Pithers, Ms M	Committee Member, School Psychologists Australia (Inc.)
Pope, Ms T A	Principal, Primary School, Elizabeth South Schools
Reynolds, Mr R B	Coordinator of Guidance and Counselling, Brisbane Catholic Education Office
Robinson, Mr P B	Executive Member, South Australian Secondary Principals Association
Rogers, Mr G	Executive Officer, NSW Child Protection Council
Ryan, Ms A M	Program Manager, Community Relations in Education Project Consortium
Saltmarsh, Mr D N	Executive Director, Melbourne Citymission

Sanders, Dr M	Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Queensland
Sandon, MP, Hon M	Victorian Shadow Minister for Education
Shores, Mr D G	Support Teacher, Holden Hill Special Education Unit, Education Department of South Australia
Slee, Dr P T	Lecturer in Human Development, Flinders University
Such, Mr J R	Chairperson, Special Education Consultative Committee, South Australian Institute of Teachers
Swaddling, Ms C	Committee Member, School Psychologists Australia (Inc.)
Tainsh, Mr M T	Manager, Behaviour Support Unit, Education Department, Department of Education, Employment and Training (SA)
Tomaszewski, Ms I	Policy Officer, School Operations, Quality Programs Division, Directorate of School Education (VIC)
Tooke, Mr P	Representing a Member, The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (QLD)
Treneman, Ms M C	Welfare Officer, NSW Teachers' Federation
Turner, Ms G	Principal, Parafield Gardens Primary School, Education Department, Department of Education, Employment and Training (SA)
Turner, Mr P M	Member, South Australian Secondary Principals Association
Walton, Mrs S J	Principal, Tintern Anglican Girls' Grammar School, The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (VIC)
Winter, Mrs D P	Committee Member, School Psychologists Australia (Inc.)
Woolley, Mr T G	Executive Member, South Australian Secondary Principals Association

APPENDIX 3
SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

Schools

- . Boys' Town, ENGADINE, NSW
- . Bundaberg Central State School, BUNDABERG, QLD

- . Centre Education Programme, KINGSTON, QLD
- . Christie Downs School, CHRISTIE DOWNS, SA

- . Elizabeth South Schools, ELIZABETH SOUTH, SA

- . Findon High, FINDON, SA

- . Gin Gin Primary School, GIN GIN, QLD

- . Mabel Park State School, SPRINGWOOD, QLD
- . Marryatville Principals Cluster Group, MARRYATVILLE, SA
- . Marymount College, BURLEIGH HEADS, QLD
- . Mentone Grammar School, MENTONE, VIC
- . Merimac State Primary School, MERRIMAC, QLD
- . Montessori School, KINGSLEY, WA
- . Mt St Michael's College, ASHGROVE, QLD

- . Newcomb Secondary College, NEWCOMB, VIC

- . Ridley Grove Schools, WOODVILLE GARDENS, SA

Private Individuals

- . Ms Andrea Allard, Ms Linda Collins, Ms Di Bretherton, The University of Melbourne, PARKVILLE, VIC

- . Dr Judith Bessant, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, COBURG, VIC
- . Mr Vaughan Bowie, Lecturer, Department of Youth Work and Justice Studies, University of Western Sydney, CAMPBELLTOWN, NSW

- . Mrs Valerie Campbell, MOUNT PRITCHARD, NSW
- . Mr Bob Cumming, WEST HOBART, TAS

- . Ms Bon Darlington, CHRISTIE DOWNS, SA
- . Ms Judyth Dowdell, LILLI PILLI, NSW

- . Ms Laura Fazzalari, SOUTH BALLARAT, VIC
- . Mr Michael Fewster, COBURG, VIC
- . Dr Lindsay Fitzclarence, Faculty of Education - Geelong, Deakin University, GEEELONG, VIC

- . Ms Margo Guest, Lecturer, School of Early Childhood and Primary Education, Monash University, FRANKSTON, VIC

- . Mr Allen Hampton, TAMWORTH, NSW
- . Mr B Hoy, TAMWORTH, NSW

- . Mrs Jean Jenkin, University of Western Sydney, CAMPBELLTOWN, NSW
- . Mr Greg Jones, ELANORA HEIGHTS, NSW

- . A T Kenos, NIDDRIE, VIC

- . Ms Sandra Mahar, TRENTHAM, VIC
- . Ms Beth Melican, Coordinator, The Protective Behaviours Programme Office, EAST MELBOURNE, VIC

- . Ms Karen Nethercote, BUNDABERG, QLD

- . Dr Paul Omaji, Coordinator, Legal Studies Program, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup Campus, JOONDALUP, WA

- . D Pollak, WEST PENNANT HILLS, NSW

- . Associate Professor K Rigby, University of South Australia, Dr P T Slee, Flinders University, ADELAIDE, SA
- . Mr Ian Rushforth, COOMA, NSW

- . The Hon Mal Sandon, MLA, Shadow Minister for Education and Member for Carrum, CHELSEA, VIC
- . Mr James Seal, DANDENONG, VIC
- . Mr David Skewes, NAIRNE, SA

Government

- . Crime and Violence Prevention Unit, Australian Institute of Criminology, CANBERRA, ACT
- . Schools and Curriculum Division, Department of Employment, Education and Training, CANBERRA, ACT

- . Victoria Police, MELBOURNE, VIC
- . West Education Centre Inc., WEST FOOTSCRAY, VIC

- . Department of Education, Employment and Training, ADELAIDE, SA

- . Tea Tree Gully Community Health Service, MODBURY, SA
- . Australian Broadcasting Authority, SYDNEY, NSW
- . Department of Education, Gender Equity Unit, Studies Directorate, BRISBANE, QLD

Catholic Education Office

- . Catholic Education Office, TORRENSVILLE, SA
- . Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, MANUKA, ACT
- . Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, LEEDERVILLE, WA

Tertiary Institutions

- . Ballarat University College, BALLARAT, VIC
- . Christian Heritage College, MT GRAVATT, QLD
- . Curtin University of Technology, PERTH, WA
- . Edith Cowan University, MOUNT LAWLEY, WA
- . Gold Coast University College of Griffith University, GOLD COAST MAIL CENTRE, QLD
- . Griffith University, BRISBANE, QLD
- . James Cook University of North Queensland, TOWNSVILLE, QLD
- . Monash University, CLAYTON, VIC
- . University of Canberra, BELCONNEN, ACT
- . University of Central Queensland, ROCKHAMPTON, QLD
- . University of Melbourne, PARKVILLE, VIC
- . University of Newcastle, NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY, NSW
- . University of Southern Queensland, TOOWOOMBA, QLD
- . University of Tasmania, HOBART, TAS
- . University of Technology Sydney, LINDFIELD, NSW
- . University of Western Australia, NEDLANDS, WA
- . University of Western Sydney, CAMPBELLTOWN, NSW

Unions/Associations/Organisations

- . Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (The), JOLIMONT, VIC
- . Association of Independent Schools of Queensland Inc. (The), SPRING HILL, QLD

- . Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools, PROSPECT, SA
- . Association of Women Educators, BRISBANE, QLD
- . Australian Association of Police-Citizens Youth Clubs, BRISBANE, QLD
- . Australian Children's Television Action Committee, NORTH CARLTON, VIC
- . Australian Council for Children's Films and Television (The), ADELAIDE, SA
- . Australian Council for Educational Research Limited (The), HAWTHORN, VIC
- . Australian Psychological Society, BRISBANE, QLD
- . Australian Education Union, South Melbourne, VIC

- . CENTACARE, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, MANUKA, ACT
- . Community Relations in Education Project: Racism and Education in Victoria, DONCASTER, VIC

- . Gay and Lesbian Teachers and Students Association Incorporated, DARLINGHURST, NSW

- . Hunter Regional Student Representative Council (The), BROADMEADOW, NSW

- . Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales Incorporated (The), ARMIDALE, NSW

- . Network Against School Violence and Intimidation (The), MEREWETHER, NSW
- . New South Wales Institute for Education Research, KENSINGTON, NSW
- . NSW Child Protection Council, SYDNEY, NSW

- . Peer Support Foundation Limited (The), MANLY, NSW
- . People Against the Walls, PORT PIRIE, SA

- . Queensland Teachers' Union, WATERFORD WEST, QLD

- . School Psychologists Australia (Inc.), TURRAMURRA NORTH, NSW
- . South Australian Association of State School Organisations Inc., NORTH ADELAIDE, SA
- . South Australian Institute of Teachers, PARKSIDE, SA
- . South Australian Secondary Principals' Association, ABERFOYLE PARK, SA
- . SPELD QLD Inc, SOUTH BRISBANE, QLD

- . Tasmanian Council of State School Parents and Friends Associations (The), HOBART, TAS

- . Victorian Psychologists Association, CARLTON SOUTH, VIC
- . Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, NORTH MELBOURNE, VIC
- . Victorian Community Council Against Violence, MELBOURNE, VIC

- . Youth Action and Policy Association (NSW) Inc, SURREY HILLS, NSW

APPENDIX 4

THEORIES ON VIOLENCE

Expert opinion has differed over the years as to whether aggression and violence are innate, instinctual reactions or socially learned behaviour.

Identifying the causes of violence is a difficult, sometimes impossible task, especially for a teacher having to deal with the current or end results of violent behaviour.

However, some understanding of the theories of violent behaviour may add further insight to the teacher's observations of students' apparent random or unexplained violence.

An important distinction that can initially be made here is between instrumental or expressive violence. Instrumental violence is seen as violence used to force a person to do something or to stop them doing it. Expressive violence expresses feelings such as fear, confusion, anger, rage or loss of face. A particular violent episode can be a mixture of both or emphasise just one type.

However we should be careful to note that, though these theories have something to add to the prediction and control of violence, just because a factor has been linked to violence does not necessarily mean it causes it. These theories divide into: Intra-individual theories, Social Psychological theories and Sociocultural theories.

Intra-individual Theories

These theories see aggression as arising from within the individual in the following possible ways:

- ***Psychopathology***

This type of explanation would see violence as coming from individual psychopathology. While the incidence of violence by psychologically disturbed people is below the incidence of the general public, a small proportion of people with certain types of emotional disorders may carry out violent acts. Such disorders may include some types of schizophrenia, acute functional psychosis and so called psychopathic personalities.

- ***Alcohol and Drug Induced Aggression***

Such theories would see violent behaviour as accompanying the abuse of drugs and alcohol.

- ***Genetic, Biological or Instinctual Theories***

Here, violence is seen as due to some inherited biological factor or physical impairment.

- ***Excitation-Transfer Theory***

This theory underlines the possible influence of emotions such as fear, anxiety, sexual excitement, vigorous exercise or an over-stimulating environment, as factors related to violence.

Social Psychological Theories

Here violence and aggression are seen as arising from the effects of social interactions in the following ways:

- ***Social Learning Theory***

This theory suggests that people learn violent behaviour through peers, the family or the media. Such behaviour is learnt through observation, participation or fantasy around violent situations and reinforced by a variety of rewards and avoidance of punishment.

- ***Frustration Aggression Theory***

This subset of Learning theory would see violence as arising from frustration where violence leads to a diminishing of the original frustration.

- ***Self Attitude Theory***

This theory would suggest that some people may use violence as a way of boosting self esteem, for example, through the attention gained by attacking prominent public figures.

- ***Boredom and Thrill Seeking***

Violence may be seen here as an attempt to inject some excitement into a boring life or as a response to a dare.

- ***Symbolic Interaction Theory***

This theory would see peoples' motivation for life as coming from the concepts, meanings and expectations they give to themselves and their social environment. Where people see themselves as being aggressive by nature, in a world where violence is the sanctioned way to succeed, they will be more likely to use violence to 'solve' future problems.

- ***Exchange Theory***

There is the assumption that adequate social interaction involves a balancing of costs and rewards. Where the interaction is not seen as beneficial by one person involved, attempts may be made to redress the imbalance or stop the encounter. These attempts may sometimes involve a resort to violence.

- ***Attribution Theory***

Violence may here be seen as the response of a person who feels that others' actions or intentions against them have a malevolent intention. Violence may take the shape of revenge.

. ***De-Individuation Theory***

This theory would claim that the likelihood of violence occurring is increased where people are able to lose their sense of individual identity and responsibility. Soldiers at war or football hooliganism could be examples of this. Also, if potential victims can be categorised as subhuman, deviant, culturally different or part of a hated system, the risk of violence occurring is, again, increased.

Sociocultural Theories

. ***Functional Theory***

The use of violence is seen as performing a certain function in society, perhaps to give new status to a social group or to change or disrupt a relationship or situation. At times, acting out behaviour may be a cry of concern about an existing relationship.

. ***Culture of Violence***

There is an assumption that certain subgroups in society are more violent than others and that they see violence as a legitimate way of gaining certain ends.

. ***Conflict Theory***

This theory holds that conflicts of interest are inevitable amongst different people and that if these differences are not resolved peaceably, violence may occur.

. ***Resource Theory***

This theory assumes that violence may occur where persons lack the resources and power to influence others or a difficult situation. Violence is seen as a way of gaining these needed resources.

. ***General Systems Theory***

General Systems Theory is concerned with the relationships and interactions between the person and their environment. An important aspect is the view that what occurs is not just the sum of the individual actions. That is, with violence, its cause is not seen just in one of the individuals involved, but in both, and their interaction in a particular context.

. ***Structural Theory***

This theory attempts a macro-level analysis of society and the way it is structured in order to show that it is this structuring that causes certain groups to be, or feel, disadvantaged. Such a sense of disadvantage may lead to attempts to change society by violence or the expression of anger and frustration through violent acts.

This theory incorporates aspects of some of the previous explanations (Frustration, Learning and Subcultural Theories), as does System Theory and it probably comes as close to an integrated theory of violence as we currently have.

Source: Bowie, V, Lecturer, Department of Youth Work and Justice Studies, University of Western Sydney, *Submission*.