



EDUCATION, ARTS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr JM Krause MP—Acting Chair
Ms W Bourne MP
Mr N Dametto MP
Miss AS Doolan MP
Ms CP McMillan MP
Mr TJ Watts MP

Staff present:

Ms L Pretty—Committee Secretary
Ms H Radunz—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—CONSIDERATION OF AUDITOR-GENERAL REPORT 6: 2024-25— PROTECTING STUDENTS FROM BULLYING

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 30 April 2025

Brisbane

WEDNESDAY, 30 APRIL 2025

The committee met at 9.00 am.

ACTING CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public briefing for the committee's consideration of Auditor-General *Report 6: 2024-25—Protecting students from bullying*. My name is Jon Krause. I am the member for Scenic Rim and acting chair of the committee for today. With me here today are Corrine McMillan, deputy chair and member for Mansfield; Wendy Bourne, member for Ipswich West; Nick Dametto, member for Hinchinbrook; Ariana Doolan, member for Pumicestone; and Trevor Watts, member for Toowoomba North, who is substituting today for Nigel Hutton, the chair and member for Keppel.

This briefing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

I remind committee members that departmental officers are here to provide factual or technical information. Any questions seeking an opinion about policy should be directed to the minister or left to debate on the floor of the House. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the briefing at the discretion of the committee or at the chair's direction.

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HANSEL, Ms Stacie, Deputy Director-General, Schools and Student Support, Department of Education

SCHIMMING, Ms Sharon, Director-General, Department of Education

STEVENSON, Ms Hayley, Assistant Director-General, Student Support, Department of Education

ACTING CHAIR: I now welcome officers from the Department of Education. Good morning, Director-General. I invite you to make an opening statement before the committee starts with our questions.

Ms Schimming: Thank you. I would like to thank the committee for providing the Department of Education with the opportunity to discuss the Queensland Audit Office *Report 6: 2024-25—Protecting students from bullying*, tabled in parliament on 16 December 2024, which examined whether the Department of Education's strategies were effective in protecting students from bullying. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this important matter and to provide the committee with an overview of the proactive measures the department is taking to prevent and respond to bullying in our schools.

As the committee would be aware, bullying is a complex social issue that is not just confined to schools. Australian studies show that between 29 per cent and 40 per cent of young people report being bullied frequently, with in-person bullying consistently reported as higher than incidents of cyberbullying. Any incidence of bullying is one too many and the potential significant long-term impacts of bullying on the mental health and wellbeing of young people cannot be ignored.

As the committee may be aware, last week the government announced a \$33 million nation-leading plan to tackle bullying in schools which the department welcomes. The funding will deliver rapid support squads to fly in to bullying hotspots and respond to schools that have any critical incidents for each of the eight regions, additional chaplains and student wellbeing staff in hundreds of schools across Queensland, and a dedicated crisis support hotline for free, confidential and immediate support for parents and carers. In line with this announcement, the department will develop

new and updated professional development resources to upskill teachers and teacher aides and stand up a new antibullying stakeholder reference group to provide critical advice, guide future initiatives and co-design the upcoming antibullying campaign.

I turn to the QAO report, which correctly identified that, while schools play an important role in preventing and responding to bullying, schools cannot do it alone. All of us together have a collective responsibility to tackle this issue. The department greatly values its partnerships with parents and stakeholders and recognises the importance of a shared approach to address bullying in our schools and in our community.

Research confirms that effectively preventing and responding to bullying requires an integrated, community-wide response. It tells us that a focus on prevention strategies has the greatest impact. Supporting every state school to lead a positive school culture where every young person has a sense of belonging and connectedness continues to be our priority.

I am proud to report that the findings from the QAO report affirm our strategies are grounded in contemporary research. We provide state schools with evidence-based approaches to address bullying. This includes all state schools establishing high expectations for behaviour, having a focus on student wellbeing and respectful relationships, and having a focus on inclusion. Each school day, staff across Queensland's 1,266 state schools go above and beyond to provide safe and disciplined learning environments for our more than 568,000 students. We are steadfastly committed to supporting each and every one of our schools to prioritise the ongoing safety, health, wellbeing and protection of our students.

I am pleased to advise that the department has commenced implementing and is further planning a range of strategies and initiatives to prevent bullying and provide robust support for those affected as part of a new action plan currently under development. The action plan will emphasise community awareness and joint action, prevent bullying behaviour through safe and disciplined schools, and enhance support for families and students. This will be achieved through streamlined policies regarding behaviour expectations, targeted professional learning, a community focused media campaign and improved tools and resources for schools, parents and students.

Every state school in Queensland has a student code of conduct which clearly outlines the expected standard of behaviour amongst students, as well as the consequences when these expectations are not met. In line with the recommendation made by the QAO, an in-depth review of the student discipline procedure is underway. Consultations with schools, students, parents and key stakeholders will inform how we strengthen the student code of conduct to include approaches to prevent and respond to bullying. Our delivery of respectful relationships education through the Australian Curriculum teaches our students behaviours and attitudes for healthy, safe and respectful relationships. A review of this program is underway with a renewed focus on bullying and the development of a new companion resource for parents to strengthen parent engagement and joint action.

The QAO report found that we need to bolster professional learning and teaching resources for school staff to identify, prevent, respond to and report bullying. In 2025, more support is being invested in Queensland state schools to provide extra hands-on, practical support in the management of student behaviour, including responding to bullying behaviours. Direct-to-school resources will be complemented by a targeted capability suite to strengthen behaviour expertise across Queensland state schools, including how to identify and respond to bullying behaviour.

Through the national Bullying No Way initiative, led by Queensland on behalf of all Australian jurisdictions and education sectors, the department provides access to evidence informed resources and activities tailored to prevent and respond to bullying. I am proud to inform the committee that 100 per cent of Queensland state schools registered to participate in the Bullying No Way: National week of action in 2024, as part of the 6,850 schools across Australia. We look forward to continued positive participation in 2025.

Our pledge to student safety and wellbeing extends beyond the classroom. We have now employed more than 850 additional wellbeing professionals through the wellbeing workforce including 166 guidance officers, 287 psychologists, 366 social workers and 47 youth workers. We are making a significant positive change in our approach towards holistic education and care, pioneering GPs and health practitioners in schools programs. Fifty state secondary schools are providing students with free access to a GP at school one day per week, with over 8,951 appointments attended in the 2024 school year. In addition, we are increasing funding to expand chaplaincy and student wellbeing officer services in 2025, meaning more of our state schools will have access to these valuable support

staff. We are establishing a Queensland antibullying stakeholder reference group, bringing together experts to inform the development of a statewide strategy focused on community awareness and joint action.

The QAO report recommended we strengthen specific guidance and support materials on bullying for parents and carers. That is why we are expanding Parentline, a free, confidential counselling service available seven days a week to all Queensland parents. Parentline offers parents and carers with help to address complex issues and concerns relating to bullying and mental health. Wraparound support will also be activated to assist schools to address critical situations in our schools. Furthermore, in line with the QAO report's recommendations, we will engage in a rigorous evaluation process to review our initiatives and the impact they have on our schools and students. These actions summarise our ongoing commitment to address bullying and focus on strengthening systems of support for all young people and communities to thrive. I am now happy to take any questions the committee may have in relation to the QAO report.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General, for your opening statement. It is much appreciated. I understand from the report that there were about five schools visited directly as part of the audit. Given there are over 1,200 state schools in Queensland, can you tell us how that marries up the scope of the audit and the variety of state school scenarios in Queensland and the reasons you think that?

Ms Schimming: Yes, five schools is not a large sample. In fact, it is a very small sample size—less than one per cent of the schools. Bullying is a really complex issue, as I have just outlined in my address. Every school has a different context and every bullying incident needs to be taken at an individual level. Five schools is not a lot, but, regardless of that, some of the recommendations that came out of that give us a glimpse into what is occurring in schools. It is difficult for the Queensland Audit Office to get around to 1,266 schools, and we completely understand that. We would have looked forward to a larger sample size to even dig deeper into how our approaches are being implemented in schools, but we work with what we have at this particular point in time and we are, as you can hear, very invested in implementing strategies to support schools. I will go to Stacie at this point in time because she can talk through the process the QAO went through with us.

Ms Hansel: We worked very closely with the QAO in relation to this audit. The conversations around the scope of the audit commenced in 2023. Initially, it was predominantly about cyberbullying. Through conversations directly with the QAO it was deemed that cyberbullying was just one facet of bullying, so the scope was extended to be bullying in general. It is just bigger than online nowadays, and I think the special media presence in terms of bullying in general has been escalated. We worked closely with QAO around the scope.

They started to visit our schools throughout 2024. The conversations then were around type of school. As the director-general mentioned, five schools is a small proportion of our schools, and those schools, to highlight some of the great practice they were delivering, were identified. The QAO also accept in their report that it was a small sample size of schools. They then did an online audit of codes of conduct of schools that helped with that narrative. As the director-general mentioned, there were certainly recommendations and learnings for us, in particular around how we can help parents navigate the complexity of bullying, whether your child is the bully or whether your child has been a victim of a bully—both two really complex situations. How families navigate both sides of that coin and how we can help them do that as a whole community has been one of the key findings of the QAO. Certainly, we will be working really closely with families around how we can strengthen the clarity of the messages we provide and how you navigate either sides of that, as mentioned.

Miss DOOLAN: I thank the department for the hard work you are doing to combat bullying in schools. My question is with reference to the proposed expansion of Parentline. Could you please advise what that expansion involves and how that benefits families and parents?

Ms Stevenson: Currently, Parentline is available from 8 am until 10 pm. We will be looking to expand the service to commence at 6 am and run until midnight. What we know is that parents are thinking about these issues and wanting to discuss them when their children are in bed or not yet awake. That is a time when the line will be utilised. Parents are then able to access some counselling support around how to support their child.

Another element we are discussing with Parentline is the inclusion of a parent navigator. If a parent were to ring Parentline to talk through the support they need for their child but identify that it is a bullying issue within our state schools and would like support also to work with the school, Parentline would engage the parent navigator so there is a clear line of linking with the school. That parent navigator will support the parent and the school to have effective relationships. Often there can be a lot of emotion in these situations and that relationship can break down.

Another element we will be looking to expand is a moderated peer support service for parents. Parents with like concerns will get online and a psychologist or a qualified professional from Parentline will moderate that discussion so they are able to help each other with the situation their child is facing.

Ms McMILLAN: Good morning, ladies. I start by acknowledging what you do for state school children, both in leading learning and in the support you provide to every child in Queensland state schools. I thank you for your work. In relation to recommendation 1, you have a mandate to develop the bullying plan. How will you measure the effectiveness of these initiatives? What are the timelines around implementation? How will you publicly report their successes?

Ms Hansel: This is really complex. We have drafted a draft action plan in consultation with key stakeholders. That is the initial phase of the group standing up. The timelines obviously will be quite varied—things we can do immediately right through to things that might take some more time, in terms of three years down the track. We are very happy to publicly report on our updates around the action plan once that gets released. We are certainly working with our reference group around what those key indicators and measures will look like as we go forward.

In terms of bullying, you heard from our director-general around the things we have started. The updates around our codes of conduct, our policies and our procedures are already underway and well advanced in terms of being able to streamline those materials. One thing we did hear was around how we can support our schools in doing that while reducing red tape and supporting their wellbeing. It is a vicious cycle of all of those elements coming together.

One big thing we heard from the QAO and families in particular was how we can help them navigate our policies and the consistent application of those policies across the state. That is well and truly underway. That review has commenced—in particular, the work around building capability under our respect program and building capability for our staff, particularly around how to identify and respond to bullying and what that looks like going forward.

The action plan, as mentioned, is very draft. Certainly, once it has been finalised it will be publicly released. There will be state school targeted initiatives. There will also be whole-of-sector initiatives. We will work with our colleagues in both Catholic and independent schools around what that might look like for them—not speaking on behalf of them but certainly working in partnership with them around how we can do this as a collective. As community members, as parents, as friends and as community, we all play a significant role in stamping out bullying.

Ms Stevenson: One of the first tasks of our expert stakeholder group when it is formed, under the chair of Professor Donna Pendergast, will be to present our draft action plan and get experts to provide their feedback on effective implementation as well as effective and appropriate evaluation of the measures we are putting in place. We will be utilising the expertise of those experts to ensure we put in place the right actions and we are able to measure their effectiveness to see whether we need to adapt our proposed actions to ensure they are in line with evidence-based practice.

Ms Hansel: We have already started conversations with students. It is great to have dialogue about students; it is more important to have dialogue with them around what is really impacting them today and how they are perceiving bullying within schools, within sporting teams, on the bus et cetera. We commenced that with our student advisory council early last term. They gave us great insight, as they always do, around some of the initiatives and the strategies. We will continue to engage those young people in the journey.

Ms Schimming: To add context over the top of any measures we put in place or any data we collect, it is really important for us to make sure we support our principals and our teachers in whatever it is we are asking. Over the past few years we have found that, when there is a system initiative or a community expectation that lands on the shoulders of principals and teachers to try to measure and adds to the work they need to do, that sometimes takes away from their core business. The QAO report talked about collecting more data. We are very cautious around collecting more data. We need to know that whatever we collect is actually being used, that it is about the insights and that there is a very strong body of evidence around what we need to do.

In terms of collecting some of the data, what you might identify as bullying may not be seen as bullying by somebody else. What one parent calls bullying another parent would call just playground behaviour. What are the responses we need to have? When we look at measuring, we really need to think about what we are measuring and for what purpose to make sure that as a system we are supporting and wrapping around schools—students and staff—to do that response.

Ms BOURNE: In terms of recommendation 3, I note that your response to the QAO was about the impact of workload and red tape for schools. I know that you agree with recommendation 3. To what extent is bullying data, in your opinion, too hard to quantify?

Ms Stevenson: It is difficult to quantify, for the reasons the director-general mentioned. It is subjective as to whether something is considered an act of bullying or a one-off act of violence or exclusion. We look at the impact on the student and ensure we are addressing the impact on the student. Getting to a place where there is a clear definition of bullying is important. Queensland, on behalf of all other states and territories, engaged South Australia University to conduct a literature review to look at what the research says and to come up with an agreed definition of bullying for all states and territories. That will be the first step to then look at how that influences the data we collect and for what purpose.

Ms Schimming: While the QAO called out that we did not have systematic data collection around specifically bullying or victims of bullying, it is important to recognise that each and every one of our schools collects that very locally. They are responding every day to individual instances and they have processes in their schools to know and understand the groups of students they need to support. In a system as big as state schooling, principals are the leaders of their site, they know their schools incredibly well and they need to be able to respond to their community and their community needs. They collect that data locally to be able to do that.

Ms BOURNE: How is it, then, that parents will get to understand just what bullying actually is so there is not just the everyday complaint about the schoolyard?

Ms Hansel: That is a great question. I think one of the core elements of the success of this will be around how we communicate what we all mean collectively—not just what state schools mean but what we all generally mean—and what we accept and do not accept in society in relation to bullying towards not only our young people, our students, but also teachers—everyone. A massive media campaign is certainly in the pipeline. It has not been finalised. It has been driven by both students and parents to say, collectively, 'We need a media campaign for our whole community around what this looks like in Queensland and what we are willing or not willing to accept in terms of this behaviour.' We will aim to have a media campaign launched in relation to exactly that—key messages for all community members, parents included—and then obviously work with our P&Cs and associations and our communities in the Catholic and independent sectors around how we communicate that directly to families through newsletters, online, social media et cetera. Consistency will be the key in terms of our communications response to this.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you for coming along this morning and briefing us, not only on your perspective on the Auditor-General's report but also on what the department is doing in conjunction with state schools to reduce bullying. It is obviously a very important topic and something we want to see reduced across the whole state school footprint and in Queensland schools in general. My question is with regard to the Auditor-General's report and only five schools being visited. I think it was stated a little earlier around an online review of state school policies with regard to bullying. How confident are you in the recommendations in the Auditor-General's report given it seems to be more of a desktop assessment in many ways, rather than something that probably should have taken a lot longer—getting deeper into the weeds and understanding this important topic a little further?

Ms Schimming: It is surface level for us. Obviously, some of the points the QAO made just encourage us to dig deeper. We know that schools are a microcosm of society. There has been a lot of media around the effect of bullying on young people. In state schools—and in fact all schools—moral purpose runs through the veins of every teacher, principal and person in the Department of Education. For us, the QAO report is just the starting point for what we know we need to do. Some of the recommendations within the report we already had underway as things we needed to do, because we know that we need to be able to respond to community expectations.

Part of the ever-increasing role of schools is to help our parents know and understand strategies they need to implement and ways to go about resolving some of the issues. Bullying is just so very complex and it is not normally just one incident or one event that leads to some of those very serious consequences that occur, and often it is even not in the school that the bullying occurs. Sometimes the end result is at the school and our teachers and principals need to be able to respond.

The QAO desktop audit around, for example, the codes of conduct that sit in the schools was a good reflection. They are big plans. They have been deliberately big plans to cover off legislatively what each school needs to be able to do. It was a good moment in time for us to say, 'Are they too long? Do we need to look at some red-tape reduction in that and how we are able to respond?' In terms of the QAO report, it was only one element of the code of conduct that a school had not done;

it was not the whole code of conduct. We take that on the chin and we say, 'That just means we need to be able to support schools to deliver a code of conduct that is able to be done on a regular basis.' They are all reviewed every four years in a fulsome way, but every year it still needs to go to the P&C meeting to make sure parents are aware.

The call-out in the QAO report was also around parents knowing who to go to if there is a particular issue in their school. Stacie can talk around the hub that is being formed so that parents have a site to go to to find those contact people and the resources.

Ms Hansel: I think that is also critical in terms of communication. I suppose the elements missing were: 'As a parent, where do I go for help? Who is my contact in the school? Who is my best placed person? Is it the teacher? Is it the GP? Is it the wellbeing officer? Is it the guidance officer?' If we can help parents and, more importantly, students themselves to navigate that, in particular in our high schools, we should. It is about having a one-stop shop and having consistency, streamlining and key contacts: 'Where do I go for help?' Kids want us to speak really factually to them in relation to this topic. They want to know how to seek out help and preventive strategies.

Hayley has done some great work in terms of our rapid response teams. We have already deployed those. While we are not going to talk specifics due to confidentiality, they have been successful already and we are hearing from schools the impact of being able to identify really great practice that we are seeing out there that is working well in complex communities or communities affected by bullying, whether in school or outside school, and the response we have been able to do to build the capability of teachers and parents in that community.

Ms Stevenson: What we know when there is one of those critical incidents is that it really takes the attention of the school and the families. When we identify the most serious of issues, it is important to provide some extra support onsite at the time—to coordinate the response, support the staff and provide a conduit for the parents but also to engage other agencies and other members of the community. We know that this is not just occurring in schools—it occurs outside of the school gates—so we need it to be a community response as well. One of the elements of the action plan is to have opportunities for local communities to undertake consultation and possibly apply for grants to implement some local strategies that are broader than the school that bring community together and highlight to their young people where in their community they can go for help that is appropriate to them. While it is system-wide, there is also a local element that we know provides the most effective response.

Mr WATTS: Thank you very much for being here today. Obviously, education is fundamental to schools, but it is also about building the whole person. The minister made a very good announcement last week in this space of anti-bullying and support. I am interested in understanding the benefits of additional chaplains—our chappies, who do such fantastic work—and wellbeing officers in schools and how that interlocks with the academic side. That is what the school is there for but, obviously, if you have these issues on the side that is preventing some of that learning. Could you elaborate on the role our chappies and wellbeing officers play and the benefits of the minister's recent announcement?

Ms Stevenson: That is a great question. We know that wellbeing and learning are inextricably linked. For young people to engage with learning, they need to have a sense of wellbeing. Their wellbeing needs to be supported. We also know that success in learning contributes to their sense of wellbeing. The more people we have in our schools who can create that connection with young people, the better they are. For us, the announcement around more chaplains and wellbeing officers is welcome. In 2023 we called for expressions of interest from all of our state schools to apply for this funding. It was extremely popular and was oversubscribed. In fact, 307 schools were not able to be funded because the funding envelope was expended. If those schools still require the support of a chaplain or wellbeing officer, this enables them to get that additional support.

The wellbeing officers and chaplains provide some of that one-on-one support, can be a counselling service, act as a role model in the school and certainly work as part of the wellbeing teams that we now have in schools. The director-general spoke of the 850 additional wellbeing professionals who are now in our schools. We have psychologists, guidance officers and social workers in numbers we have never seen before. These additional chaplains and wellbeing officers will be a welcome addition to those wellbeing teams that we have in our schools across the state.

Ms Schimming: The other part that is really important is that it then allows our teachers to teach. The role of a teacher and the role of a principal continues to expand. We are looking at who else should be in the school to support those things so that teachers, who have trained to be teachers, can do that in a way that children are really supported. The additional chaplaincy and wellbeing support is key for us to have that focus so we can improve learning outcomes for children.

Ms Hansel: If I can give anecdotal insight, I was teaching in Central Queensland last term in a grade 3 classroom. At the end of lunch the kids came in and they all tapped on an iPad as they walked in, as I am coordinating them. It is a long time since I have been in the classroom, but it was great. Then suddenly a wellbeing professional and chaplain came down, knocked on the door and said, 'Can I meet with this student?' I said, 'Absolutely,' and they went and had a conversation. I said, 'How come that triggered you to come down to the classroom?' and he said, 'They've indicated for the last two days that they were feeling a little bit anxious after coming back from lunch, so I needed to check in with them how they were.' I, as the classroom teacher, was still teaching my science lesson that afternoon as the chaplain worked one on one with that young person in the back of the classroom. It was absolutely fantastic and a great support for that little individual and it did not take me away from my day-to-day classroom teaching.

Mr WATTS: Thank you. It is really interesting to hear that anecdote. Obviously, we want people to get on with the learning, and this support structure is important to that. I would be interested in comments around programs such as Clontarf or Beyond the Broncos that exist in schools and what sort of structure they provide that might help in this space as well.

Ms Schimming: Organisations that can support our schools to engage students and children in learning are key to how we need to broaden what we are doing. Those organisations have some specific targets for us around the engagement of students, some of them specifically for our equity cohorts that sit within schools—our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in particular. If you do not go to school, it is hard for us to teach you. It is important to have those relationships that are necessary to improve their learning outcomes and obviously their life chances.

Across the state we have five organisations that engage with schools. We usually identify those schools based on the data we have available to us and also the willingness of a community to engage. We are often using our attendance data and our academic performance data as well as some discipline and absence data for us to say, 'Who is on our list that needs some additional support?'

Mr WATTS: In the anti-bullying space, for want of a better expression, do those organisations have a role in time out or dealing with situations?

Ms Hansel: As part of the campaign, for anyone who comes into our schools and is working closely with our schools there is a consistent message around the response. I agree with you. We are looking to partner with some new organisations in our detention centres as well—working closer with our young people who might need some additional support in those circumstances. I think consistency of response will be critical in terms of how we can engage with our young people the best they need, not what we think they need.

Ms Schimming: In term of engagement programs, students are staying at home because they do not feel they belong in a school or they have been bullied or had an incident. They have a strong role, as all of us do, in making sure students have a connection in the school and resolve any issues they may have around attendance. There are many symptoms of bullying in a particular school. Sometimes it is not just about bullying, but it might lead to that. The prevention part for us and then the engagement are really key.

Ms Stevenson: Those programs really provide an opportunity for those students to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of connection. We know that student engagement is along a continuum. The first step for the student is getting out of bed and wanting to walk through the school gate. From there, once they are inside the school gate it is walking into a classroom. Then once they are in a classroom it is engaging with the learning. The attendance and engagement programs you spoke of provide an incentive for that young person to walk through the school gate. Then they are met by a friendly face and they have a sense of belonging and connection with the school. It is a really important first step for us to get that young person on a positive learning trajectory.

Miss DOOLAN: As we look 10 or 15 years down the track, what do you anticipate will be the biggest challenges for schools to overcome bullying?

Ms Schimming: As I said before, schools are a microcosm of society. The behaviours reflected in our schools are actually the behaviours we see out in the community. For all of us there has been a shift, over the past five years at least, if not a little bit longer, incrementally around people not being able to regulate their behaviour. One of our greatest challenges in schools is the deregulated responses that our children have and that our parents have. It would not be a surprise to anybody to know that our teachers and our principals are really asking for support in how to engage parents positively, because they are on the receiving end of some very negative and sometimes aggressive parents with unrealistic expectations.

I think the expanse of bullying is about all of our behaviour and how we engage to resolve problems. I would think in the next 10 years, if we are not really heavily investing in the whole of society in regulating behaviour—you would all know. You have your own social media pages that people feel at liberty to make outrageous comments on. Unless we can stem some of that negative conversation that people have and the right people think they have to give you feedback that is disrespectful and aggressive, that will then be represented in our schools. Together, I think we have to be able to measure that and combat that as we go. It is not just in schools. You know that many professions—our nurses, bus drivers, train drivers—have had to put out messages: 'This is our job. We are human beings.'

Mobile phones are now banned in schools. I can remember thinking, 'Principals can make those decisions,' and many of them did, but the feedback we have from banning mobile phones has been so overwhelmingly positive. The feedback is that playgrounds are noisy again. Rather than kids sitting on their phones and being antisocial, they are actually talking to people. If we do not manage the social media influence really well, we are going to have some consequences. In my mind, in 10 years, if we can have some really targeted strategies on helping people be better people, that will be well reflected in our schools.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. That is a good answer to what could be a very big question. The report discusses an evaluation the department conducted in 2023 which highlighted the need to provide greater clarity to principals on the required responses to incidents involving more vulnerable students including students with a disability. What work has the department done to implement practices to provide that clarity? Secondly, is data collected about particular characteristics of student victims of bullying? I understand hitherto it has been more about the bully themselves. What challenges might arise from a resourcing and work perspective if a decision was taken to collect more data about victims?

Ms Stevenson: The way we collect the information about incidents involving bullying is generally that it can be identified as a particular behaviour that is involved in an incident and it generally is around the young person who has demonstrated that behaviour. I think to have categories of victims of bullying would be extremely difficult, because it is very subjective. We have a number of measures already in place to highlight students we might have concerns for. It does not necessarily need to be as a result of a bullying incident. We monitor the level of engagement that a young person has, as we spoke of with the wellbeing professionals that we have in our schools. We are able to detect if there is a young person who might be struggling and then we can activate the support for them. All of the data we collect at an individual student level is able to be disaggregated to identify, for example, a First Nations student, a student in care or a student with disability. There are a whole lot of ways we can look at the data to highlight the cohorts that may be over-represented or at greater risk. Then we rely on the data and the information that is gleaned at a school level and in our classrooms to activate those individual supports.

It also highlights the reason we need to enhance the confidence and capability of our parents and our students around help-seeking behaviours. The data does not tell the whole story. Students can fly under the radar and not necessarily be picked up in the data. I think there is an issue about us skilling our young people to know how to ask for help and where they go for help. When we presented this issue to the Ministerial Student Advisory Council, they certainly echoed that that element of help seeking is needed—and then for our parents to feel confident enough to have the conversation with their child to pick up whether something is wrong and know how to have that supportive and effective conversation and then what to do with that—who they then seek help from themselves, whether it is Parentline, their GP or the school. It is a really complex issue and the data is just one element of it.

Ms Hansel: Each of our state schools has a student database system called OneSchool. They collect this data individually at every school site and have been doing so for quite some time. They are the key, critical ingredient in terms of identifying kids at risk and, more importantly, disengagement. We have amazing teachers in our schools who do this on a daily basis and principals who lead this great work. The QAO report identified that we did not aggregate that up higher on a system level. While we collected data very well at an individual school level, we were not able to have oversight of that.

Since the finding, which we heard quite early on from QAO, we have put in place new measures, new datasets and new dashboards so that from a system perspective our regional directors, Sharon as the director-general and I now have a collated view and perspective of incidents across our schools, where they are occurring. Schools are already looking at their data and saying, 'Is it happening in playground X?' and then putting more supervision or additional support there. They

are seeing what is occurring on a daily basis and they are responding to that. That was very clearly identified by QAO as a really great positive that our schools were doing. It was more at the larger, system level—the data collection.

In terms of a response to the red-tape question, collecting more data needs to have an impact and an outcome. 'Would it change our response?' would be our question around collecting data. What would we do with it that we are not doing already in identifying the characteristics of our young people when they start to disengage? Our position with QAO was that collecting additional data may not have the impact we are after in terms of a good response to our young people.

Ms McMILLAN: I am looking at recommendation 6 in relation to staff capability. Has a workload impact statement been completed by the department? Have we any feedback from teachers around the increased burden on the workforce?

Ms Schimming: The first part of this is that teachers and principals are actually asking for additional supports in behaviour management and strategies they can implement in their schools. None of the capability programs that are in development at this point—there are modules already developed—are compulsory for people to complete. At this point it is awareness raising. School principals will determine at the beginning of a year through their planning processes what type of professional development their staff need at a particular point in time. It is often when a critical incident happens at a school that a teacher or a leadership team will think, 'We need to do this piece of work.' Our expectation would be, though, that it is not extra work that people need to do; it is part of a day in the life of a teacher and/or principal that activation of and participation in modules would happen. I might hand over to Hayley to talk about the modules themselves. There are six modules in development.

Ms Stevenson: These modules that are specifically about bullying will be part of the more comprehensive behaviour capability suite that will be rolled out in conjunction with the Behavioural Boost funding. There will be some specialist behaviour training for those behaviour specialists and for different staff across a school. In relation to bullying specifically—this should be released this term—there will be six modules available online for teachers or any school staff to work their way through. There are topics such as understanding bullying, characteristics of bullying, types of bullying, other types of aggression, recognising bullying and the impacts of bullying—looking at the impacts on the young person's wellbeing and social connections. They are all based in evidence and contextualised to the Queensland setting and Queensland schools. We are looking forward to making them available. We will also be open to feedback from schools around their implementation and usefulness. We will continue to revise and review those to make sure they are fit for purpose.

Ms McMILLAN: I notice that those modules are very content driven. As you move through the implementation phase of the work of Dr Donna Pendergast, do you imagine they will be more focused on strategies for intervention?

Ms Schimming: Absolutely. The other part to the strategy is the additional behaviour resources that have gone into schools. Principals can determine what that resource is, whether that is a teacher or someone from the non-teaching workforce. The goal for that role in the school is also practical implementation of that knowledge within the modules. We all know that it is on-the-job training that is the greatest benefit that many of our teachers have with that. The modelling of behaviour management strategies will be part of the role of the Behavioural Boost that has gone into our schools.

Ms Hansel: I absolutely agree. I think as we evolve and our learning evolves in the work we are doing nationally, it will certainly dictate where we need to go next to be more innovative and up to date in terms of the evidence and research around what works best and in what type of context and with what kids. There will be evolutions of that work and we certainly will support schools if they need release time to access those modules and work through them.

Ms BOURNE: In relation to the department's decision to only agree in principle to recommendation 4, will the department use School Opinion Survey data and the school review process to intervene where needed?

Ms Schimming: Absolutely. The line of sight that we have at this point in time, due to the datasets that we have available to us—we have a thing called a regional performance assessment. With our regional directors and our school supervisors we look in detail at the data they have about their schools and the interactions they have in those schools. We are also using the school review process to feed in to our processes of accountability and support—mostly around support. Often when we have a conversation about a school at a regional performance assessment it is to identify what additional support needs to go into a school. I would say that there is a level of strength that sits

in the datasets we have available to us to identify where we need to go. There are other datasets such as the wellbeing survey that is conducted in schools on a voluntary basis at this point in time. There is a lot of data available to us and we use that to identify where our supports need to go.

Ms Hansel: One of the recommendations in the draft strategy is to look at more targeted reviews—specific reviews around particular topics that might be needed. A school might identify that they need a really targeted place-based review in terms of this initiative or bullying or behaviour—so what might that look like if we went out and audited our schools around a targeted intervention approach that is required and the data we would use around that? Yes, that is in the pipeline as well.

Mr DAMETTO: In terms of children being bullied or being bullies in the school setting, is any data collected on their influences? I think that is very important. I think the schools and Education Queensland are doing a fantastic job educating schoolchildren on right and wrong behaviour, but they are obviously subject to outside influences. Do you have any data around that?

Ms Hansel: It is a really interesting and great question. I think for us it has been the foundation of our response. The biggest influence in a young person's life is the adults closest to them. The behaviour they are seeing is the behaviour they are learning and accepting. It is parents, coaches, people on buses, older influencers. It is probably people closest to them, in their homes as well as in their community. Schools have been doing an amazing job for years, but it is now up to all of us to lean in and support everyone.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for your questions, members. I thank the director-general, deputy director-general and assistant director-general for their time here this morning in our people's Legislative Assembly. I hope you have enjoyed being here with us. That concludes our briefing. Thank you again for participating. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 10.00 am.