

Question on Notice
No. 726
Asked on 12 June 2018

Mr S Andrew asked Premier and Minister for Trade (Hon. A Palaszczuk)—

QUESTION:

With reference to cyberbullying and bullying in schools, and acknowledging the Premier's attendance of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in February 2018 and reports of bullying in many of the schools within the Mirani Electorate—

Will the Premier advise (a) the percentage of principals, educators and parents that are involved in the working group led by the Education Council established to combat bullying and cyberbullying and (b) if none, what consultations will be had with principals, educators and parents before the education council reports their findings at the next COAG meeting to combat bullying and cyberbullying?

ANSWER:

My Government is taking a lead role in addressing cyberbullying and bullying in Australia. I was pleased that the Prime Minister, the Honourable Malcolm Turnbull MP, acted on my request to include the issue of bullying on the agenda for the 9 February 2018 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting. I presented a paper at that meeting to encourage national consideration of how governments can work together to better protect young Australians.

Following the COAG meeting, a working group of senior officials from First Ministers', Education, Justice, and Health departments was established to consider existing and potential initiatives to help combat bullying and cyberbullying, and drive a whole-of-community approach to the issue.

The working group is considering the underlying drivers of this behaviour, along with any gaps in the community's response to bullying and cyberbullying. This work will inform the development of a work program which will be referred to the COAG Education Council. To date, the working group has utilised existing resources and expertise from within the nominated departments to gather this information. The senior officials involved are highly experienced and have backgrounds in education, health, and law. The COAG Education Council is expected to report back to COAG at its next meeting.

Queensland's Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce was established in February 2018 to develop a framework, with recommendations for community and government action to reduce to incidence of bullying and cyberbullying by 31 August 2018.

Taskforce membership includes three young people, Members of Parliament from both major political parties, representatives of teachers and parents, and members with academic expertise in bullying and cyberbullying, adolescent psychiatry and internet and media law. Members include one current and two former school principals, a Professor of Education, the President of P&C's Queensland and the President of the Queensland Teachers Union. The collective expertise of the Taskforce includes child protection, youth services, parenting, education, youth mental health, adolescence and journalism.

The Taskforce undertook extensive consultation from late-April to mid-June 2018, completing 59 sessions across the state, in Brisbane, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Palm Island, Townsville, Toowoomba, the Sunshine Coast (Kawana Waters), Thursday Island, Cairns, Roma, Caboolture, Maryborough, the Gold Coast (Helensvale) and Mount Isa.

The Taskforce consulted with people from across the community, including school principals and teachers, guidance officers, school students, and other professionals, parents and community members with a broad range of experience and expertise in education, child and youth mental health, and parenting. Consultations included 13 public forums, nine roundtables with school professionals (such as principals, guidance officers, school nurses) and five secondary students' forums. Approximately 650 people attended these consultation sessions.

More than 360 written submissions were received by the Taskforce from individuals, organisations, parents and young Queenslanders. All submissions received were reviewed by Taskforce members and are confidential.

A Ministerial Student Advisory Council, made up of 16 students, met on 7 June 2018 to share with the Honourable Grace Grace MP, Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations their different perspectives and experiences of cyberbullying as well as suggestions for actions. Student representatives on the Council came from 16 schools across Queensland including Cairns State High School, Pimlico State High School, Longreach State High School, Charleville State High School, Bundaberg State High School, Balmoral State High School, Boonah State High School, and St Rita's College. The ideas put forward by this student council will be progressed to the Taskforce.

While Queensland has zero tolerance for bullying in its schools, cyberbullying can follow kids into their homes and into their rooms. The national Office of the eSafety Commissioner plays an important role in providing resources to help children and young people have safe online experiences. It also administers a complaints service for young Australians who experience serious cyberbullying. I have expressed support for increasing the presence of the eSafety Commissioner and asked the Federal Government to consider establishing an Office of the eSafety Commissioner in Queensland as a priority.

Cybersafety awareness for schools and students is an ongoing focus for Queensland's Department of Education (DoE). The DoE has a dedicated team of specialists to assist schools in tackling cyberbullying and staying safe online. The Cybersafety and Reputation Management team has provided proactive presentations to students on online safety and positive digital footprints, with more than 1100 information sessions presented to over 150,000 students in 444 schools since July 2013. Support is also available to parents and community members through the DoE Cybersafety Advice Facebook page.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse commended the DoE Cybersafety and Reputation Management team for its proactive and effective strategies to respond to and prevent online issues for students, which it suggested is an exemplar and model for other jurisdictions.

These efforts and initiatives contribute significantly to Queensland's response to this issue. I look forward to receiving the Taskforce's final report by the end of August 2018 to continue our whole-of-community approach to addressing bullying and cyberbullying.