

SCHOOLS — BULLYING

Motion

HON SAMANTHA ROWE (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [1.10 pm]: I move —

That this house notes the importance of developing strategies to prevent and manage bullying in schools. Today is a timely opportunity to have this debate and discussion in this house, primarily because this Friday, 15 March, is National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence in Schools. The theme for 2019 is “Bullying. No Way! Take action every day”. The national day of action gives schools the chance to not only take action in this space, but also, more importantly, empower students and young people to be part of the solution when addressing bullying in their schools and school community. As this debate progresses over the next two hours, I look forward to hearing from members across the chamber about their experiences in their school communities, and perhaps some examples of what is and what is not working well in their schools. We all have a responsibility to ensure that every student is given the best opportunity to learn in a safe environment.

We know that a number of schools in this state have strong leadership and a strong school culture and are able to deal with bullying incidents in a very good fashion. However, parents are understandably concerned that the balance is not always quite right. The perception is often that the student who is being bullied is the one who has to change their actions, and the student who is undertaking the bullying is “let off”, if you like, from any consequences. I want to share with members throughout this debate those schools that are managing bullying incidents well, and share some of the strategies used in those schools and school communities. I particularly want to assure parents that bullying is not tolerated in schools and is most definitely taken seriously. Australian research suggests that up to one in four students have experienced face-to-face bullying, and one in five students have experienced online bullying at some point in their lives. The physical harm that may be caused by bullying is often obvious and well recognised. If bullying is both ongoing and untreated, it may also cause both short-term and long-term psychological harm. It may cause physical health impacts such as fatigue; mental health impacts such as depression and anxiety; and social impacts such as self-doubt and reluctance to participate in group activities. That is why it is important that schools, parents and what I like to call the broader school community work together to ensure that bullying behaviour is not accepted and not tolerated in schools. Every student has the right to be in a safe environment in which they have the absolute best opportunity and support to be able to learn. Parents first and foremost want their child to be happy. They also want their child to feel safe at school. The parents in the room may want to correct me on that, but I imagine that parents first and foremost want their child to be happy.

Hon Donna Faragher: I agree 110 per cent.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: I am so glad you agree, Hon Donna Faragher.

In order to achieve this, everyone has a role to play and a responsibility to undertake. Schools absolutely have an imperative role in creating a safe environment for students. Parents and carers also have a vital role. The broader school community also needs to take responsibility for the role it plays in making sure that schools adopt behaviours that are respectable and acceptable in society. That includes community sporting groups. Bullying is a learnt behaviour. If kids see bullying on the sports field and see adults interact in an adverse way outside their school environment and their home, that will have an impact. Therefore, we all have a role to play to make sure that students are given the best start and the best opportunity to study and learn in a safe environment.

Last year, the Minister for Education and Training asked me to lead a project of work to look at how we can reduce the incidence of bullying in schools. We recognise that this is a very sensitive and at times very emotional issue not just for schools, but particularly for parents and school communities. That gave me the opportunity to share with schools the best practice that we can find in this area. The schools that have got this right provide an opportunity for us to showcase where it is working well and what that looks like. Other schools can then say, “Okay; maybe we need to treat this, or treat that.” It also provides an opportunity for parents to say, “This is what it looks like when it is done well.” If parents are concerned that bullying is not being dealt with in a way that they find satisfactory, they can turn to an example of where it is being done well and there are good outcomes and say to their school, “Have you looked at this model? What do you think about the processes that school X has in place?”

As part of that project, I visited a number of schools across the state, both metropolitan and regional. I met with different stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents and students. When I visited these schools, I often had separate discussions with these groups. That is very important. We want students to feel that they can be open in the discussion and not have teachers listening in to what they are saying. It is important that parents are able to speak openly about their experiences and what they think is working well in their school’s anti-bullying policy and what is not. It is important to hear from teachers who have buy-in on the anti-bullying policy and culture in their school.

That was a very important exercise to undertake. A number of common themes came out from those visits to schools that had a positive and strong culture and in which the anti-bullying policy was working well. The first

theme was that there was strong leadership and what I like to call a whole-of-school approach. That includes buy-in from not just the principal and the leadership team, but also the teachers and support staff at the school, so that not just one person is championing the anti-bullying policy or process but a consistent message is being sent throughout the entire school. It is also important to have buy-in from the parents and carers, and from the students. Everyone needs to be on the same page and say, “This is the culture we want for our school.” It is also important to have a clear definition of bullying. We need to use clear language that everyone understands. Parents need to understand the difference between a one-off violent incident, which is absolutely not appropriate or acceptable, and bullying. It came through loud and clear from the meetings I had that everyone needs to be on the same page, with a clear understanding of the definition of bullying. There are three critical aspects to the definition of bullying: it involves a misuse of power in a relationship, it is ongoing and repeated, and it involves behaviour that can cause harm. As I said earlier, there are many harmful aspects, including physical and psychological, to ongoing bullying for young people. There also needs to be a formal and clear process for how bullying is dealt with in a school. Everyone needs to be well aware of that formal process, so that everyone in the school can say, “This is our bullying process.” Any teacher in the school can then turn to it and students can understand the process, if either they are being bullied or they are the person who is doing the bullying. There also need to be clear consequences. A formal process needs to be followed and understood, so that everyone involved is very, very clear about what will and will not be tolerated in the school. A suggestion made by a principal about how to have that buy-in from all parties and stakeholders was to have a social contract between students, teachers and parents, so that everyone understands what will be accepted and what everyone wants for the school. This would work particularly well for new schools that want to set up a new anti-bullying policy, as they could get everyone involved right at the get-go about how they want the school to look and grow into the future.

I also held a forum towards the end of last year, to which students, teachers and parents were invited to share with me and others the tools and resources they would find useful in dealing with bullying. To facilitate this process, we invited Professor Donna Cross from the Telethon Kids Institute, who is an expert in the field of the prevention of bullying and cyberbullying, as well as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Mr Colin Pettit. They are both experts in this field. It was great to have their input, and also for them to have the opportunity to hear what students and parents felt they needed. These are people who have done years and years of research—Professor Donna Cross in particular—on what works best for young people. At times during the forum, we split up the students from the adults so that they could feel they could participate openly without parents or teachers overseeing them. We also had a separate discussion with parents and teachers, so that those two groups could hear from each other about their concerns. A lot of the problem comes down to a lack of communication. If clear communication does not exist—if a school is not open with parents and parents feel that they cannot contact the principal or a teacher if a bullying issue has arisen with their child—it will lead to a whole lot of awful problems, which can escalate really quickly.

Professor Donna Cross was able to share with parents and teachers some of her suggestions on what to do when a student approaches them about being bullied. She advised that it is actually really rare and really hard for a young person to make that first move to ask for help, or to put up their hand and say that they are not comfortable, are not feeling safe and feel like they are being bullied. She stressed that that is a really big step. She talked throughout the forum, and also in an article I have here entitled “Cyberbullying: Building Resilience”, about something called the LATE model for teachers. For those who are not aware what this is, the LATE model stands for listen, acknowledge the young person’s concerns, talk about options and end with encouragement. The article outlines the model as —

Listen—Thank the student for sharing the information with you, ask open ended questions, use non-invasive communication options such as walk and talk;

Acknowledge the young person’s concerns—using reassuring statements such as ‘It sounds like you are having a tough time’;

Talk about options—so that students feel in control of their own problems. Ask the student what they have tried already and if it has worked for them and what they would like you to do to help them;

End with encouragement—to give the student a feeling of hope and that they could come back and talk some more if needed. It may also be beneficial to follow-up with students at a later date, to ensure the problem has been resolved or to offer further assistance.

Professor Donna Cross noted that this approach is not only restorative, but also empowering for the young person. She said that it is about trying to build on the strengths of the young person, rather than taking over and encouraging learnt helplessness. She noted in her article —

“It’s a delicate conversation and teachers need to respect how hard it was for that young person to speak to an adult and to work through a process that empowers that young person and gives them control and agency in the situation.”

“The error we’ve often made in the past is believing that the best action is for parents or teachers to take over and quickly fix the situation.

I can totally relate to that, because my natural instinct, if someone came to me, would be to try to fix it for them. It is really important that parents and teachers at the forum were able to hear this message and have it reinforced. Professor Donna Cross works with the Department of Education and has assisted in the past in making sure that we have suitable programs and tools in place to support teachers and parents across the state.

On Friday, we will be releasing resources to assist our schools and parents when they are dealing with these very sensitive and emotional issues. A number of resources are already out there, but what kept coming back to us was that sometimes parents just did not know where to go. It can also sometimes feel a little overwhelming, as there is so much information out there. We want to try to create a one-stop shop, so that schools and parents have access to that huge wealth of information that is already out there to support them, and also a planning template for schools, to encourage them to have an anti-bullying process and to outline what that should look like, in case that is not clear to them.

Hon Colin Tincknell: Will you take an interjection?

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: I will, hopefully, have a right of reply, and I will be happy to take your interjection then. I have only two minutes left now; sorry.

We will also have a dedicated Connect community, so that public school staff can share strategies—I think it is important that schools can share what is working well and what is not; that is pretty important intellectual property—and there is a resource for parents that provides advice and strategies if their child is being subjected to bullying behaviour. There is not a one size fits all. This is an extremely stressful issue for parents to go through, but we want to make sure that we get that balance right. Yes, there are schools across the state that are doing a fantastic job, and I congratulate them. We want to be able to showcase what they are doing and to use them as best-case examples. But we need to be able to support parents who feel like they are not being heard or that they do not have the chance to communicate properly with schools, as well as to support the students. Sometimes, just being kept up-to-date and in the loop and having that line of communication is all parents are looking for. There are pretty simple things we can put in place. That will not solve everything—absolutely not—but there are little things we can do to try to support our school system, our parents and, most importantly, our young people. I look forward to hearing the other contributions.

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan) [1.30 pm]: I rise to support the motion moved by Hon Samantha Rowe. As she indicated, it is timely, given that this Friday is the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence. It is an important awareness raising day for schools, but equally, in my view, every day should be a day of action against bullying and violence. Bullying, in any form, is completely unacceptable. I absolutely agree with Hon Samantha Rowe that it is critical that schools deliver programs that support all students to be safe from harm, including bullying and discrimination, and promote tolerance and respect. We also need to ensure that parents and caregivers are supported with knowledge and practical resources to help them to be better informed about bullying and what they can do about it. I will be interested to see what is launched on Friday.

We know that bullying occurs in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. It can start off with teasing about someone’s appearance, gender, sexuality, cultural background or religion, or for any other reason. It can arise when friendships break down. It can be straight-out intentional harassment just because someone does not like someone else. It can be verbal or physical. It can occur through online interaction via social and other media. It can be overt or hidden, or a combination of both. Either way, bullying has a lasting impact on the person being bullied, as well as their families and carers. It is an uneven power play, in which the victim inevitably cannot easily respond to the bullying or stop it from happening repeatedly. The impacts on a child’s overall health and wellbeing and, very much from a school perspective, their learning potential, are clear. Some of the consequences, as we have seen, unfortunately, so many times, can be both devastating and tragic. Maggie Dent, like Donna Cross, is often viewed as one of the queens of commonsense on children’s issues. In a blog post some time ago she raised some good issues. She wrote —

Many victims are chosen because they appear vulnerable or just because they are different—not because they are weak. They have a different culture, they have big ears, —

Some people have issues with people’s red hair. I do not know why, but there you go.

Hon Samantha Rowe: It is outrageous.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: It is outrageous, and I am quite sure the Minister for Education and Training would agree with me on that. The post continues —

they are overweight, they seem to have no friends or they have a noticeable life challenge. Then there are the victims who are chosen because they have what the bully values and wishes he/she had good looks, wealthy family, courage to be individual, a girlfriend/boyfriend, artistic talent, lots of good friends, school success or even a happy family. The bully's actions are what then causes the victim to struggle—being frightened for one's safety, being shamed, harassed, constant verbal and psychological abuse, and being excluded all cause deep trauma within children and adolescents. The thinking processes become distorted and the inner critic voice of many victims will become negative, toxic and the cycle of self-destructive and critical thoughts continually erodes the victim so that they then attack themselves. Effectively, **they bully themselves and expect to be bullied** this is a very difficult cycle to break and this can have lethal consequences especially in adolescence.

For all those reasons, and many more, as Hon Samantha Rowe said, we need to view bullying as not just a school issue but a whole-of-community issue. It starts with parents, absolutely, but it also requires active school and community involvement.

I want to say a bit about cyberbullying, as one example. As a member of Parliament, a member of our community and a mum, I would say that this is a huge area of concern for many parents. For the life of me, I cannot understand how people can write the things they do online, hiding behind very hurtful and cruel words that we as adults, let alone a 10, 12 or 14-year-old child, would find distressing. Children who have their lives ahead of them are victimised by heartless bullies—that is what they are—who somehow think it is okay, it is a joke, or whatever else might be going through their minds. I am not going to repeat everything, but things that are written include “no-one actually likes you”, “you should just kill yourself”, “you don't know what's coming”, “you're ugly; you're fat.” Terrible words can be written about the death of a family member. These are not just words. Then there are videos that often go viral. Gone are the days, unfortunately, when home was actually a safe place; someone who might have been bullied at school could at least retreat to their family outside of school hours. Today, there is actually no safe place—it is 24/7, and it is absolutely unrelenting. It is particularly disturbing when we hear and read stories of bullying behaviour being justified or not taken seriously. In preparing for today, I saw a report from just last month on Channel Nine that relates to a Gold Coast situation. I do not know the details, but I will just read it as it is. It states —

The father of one of two Gold Coast girls allegedly abusing a peer in a video posted online says his daughter was “simply mucking around”.

This is the father. The report continues —

The video of the pair allegedly telling another child to “kill herself” has caused widespread outrage after it was posted to Facebook ...

The girls can be heard telling the unknown recipient of the video to “kill herself” and that “everyone hates her”.

The mother of the girl targeted told 9News her daughter was “simply not coping” as a result of the abuse.

Meanwhile, the father of one of the two girls in the video says his daughter was “mucking around” and she is planning to apologise.

I know that we would all agree that telling someone to kill themselves is not mucking around.

Hon Alison Xamon: It is disgraceful.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: It is disgraceful.

More generally, a significant body of work was undertaken by the Commissioner for Children and Young People last year, in a report titled “Speaking Out About School and Learning”. I am fortunate to be on the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, and we often get to hear the really good things that the commissioner does, but that particular report provides a really good insight into issues surrounding engagement in schooling and learning, very much drawing on the views of children themselves. The research involved 1 800 year 3 to year 12 students. Although the commissioner found that the majority of students felt safe at school all or most of the time, some 11 per cent of year 3 to year 6 students, and 20 per cent of year 7 to year 12 students surveyed felt unsafe sometimes or often. The commissioner put those figures into perspective when he stated —

Compared to the size of WA's student population, that equates to around 50,000 Year 3 to Year 12 students who sometimes don't feel safe and are often afraid someone will hurt or bully them at school.

These are our students; these are our kids, and this is what they are telling the commissioner. The report went on to highlight that some 44 per cent of year 7 to year 12 students reported being afraid at least once in the current school year that someone at school would hurt or bully them. Disturbingly, some 28 per cent said that they had stayed away from school at least once as a result. The commissioner made a number of findings, and highlighted

suggestions made by students that could improve safety in schools. No doubt a number of these suggestions have also been put forward through the consultation that Hon Samantha Rowe referred to. As the commissioner highlighted in a general policy brief —

Evidence strongly suggests that children and young people who feel safe and are safe are more resilient, confident and have a stronger sense of self-identity.

Adults have a responsibility to help children and young people understand their rights about safety, support them to speak up about any concerns, and to act appropriately on concerns regarding safety. Furthermore, adults are responsible for creating environments that are child safe.

A child safe organisation values children and understands safety doesn't just happen. A commitment to protecting children and promoting their wellbeing is embedded in the organisation's culture and is understood and accepted by everyone.

Within education, safety is critical for learning as it affects students' willingness to attend school and their ability to engage in learning.

The importance of adequate systems and structures to promote and support student safety in schools and to respond to concerns for safety cannot be understated. Within schools, feeling and being safe is essential for students to be ready and able to engage with learning.

It is with that in mind, and a whole range of work and what we know as human beings, that it is critical that schools have appropriate supports and a variety of resources, whether that be whole-of-school strategies to address and prevent bullying from happening in the first place, to professional learning for teachers, classroom activities and so on. Certainly within our education system, a number of programs are well established. Those programs are focused on resilience, conflict resolution, positive communication, self-regulation skills and the like—namely, the PATHS program, Friendly Schools PLUS and many more evidence-based programs that can make a positive difference in not only tackling bullying but also helping to build resilience, empathy and emotional and social strengths and competence. School counsellors and support staff are also vital.

I notice that students from Perth College, my former school, are in the public gallery. Welcome! We are talking today about the important issue of bullying.

Good pastoral care is also very important. That was strongly supported by the former Liberal government and I am pleased that it continues to be supported under the current government. School chaplains are highly valued within their schools. YouthCARE, a wonderful organisation, provided me with a snapshot. The organisation now has 434 chaplains in 610 schools. In 2018, the chaplains talked to more than 2 200 students every week, more than 800 staff and more than 350 parents and carers. They do amazing work and provide that added opportunity to students who may feel that they cannot talk to a teacher. They may not feel that they can speak to their parent, but they may well feel confident enough to have the support and understanding of a chaplain. That is critical, and it is wonderful to see so many chaplains in our schools.

In recognising all these initiatives, can we say that it is enough? No, we cannot. Do we need to continue to look at new ideas and evidence? Yes, we do, because it is still happening. Bullying is an issue not just for schools; it is a community issue. From a parent's perspective, I absolutely agree with Hon Samantha Rowe that it is important that we ensure that parents have the resources and support they need to deal with bullying of their child. A recent national survey of parents undertaken by The Royal Children's Hospital showed that one in five parents reported that one or more of their children was bullied in the last school term. Almost every parent of a child who was bullied said that the experience affected the whole family. Obviously, one would expect that. One in six parents had felt physically sick and one in five felt depressed or anxious. Almost half worried about the long-term effects of bullying on their child—I thought it would be 100 per cent—and many were angry and frustrated at being unable to help. One in three felt guilty for not being able to stop the bullying and one in four felt helpless. The survey indicated also that 87 per cent of parents were not confident that they would know whether their child was being bullied and only half said they would know whether their child was the bully. They are sobering statistics. This is one survey, and other surveys will be undertaken. Notwithstanding that, there clearly is an issue here and it is something that we need to continue to address.

In bringing my remarks to a close, I indicate again that I strongly support the motion. It is up to us as members of Parliament, as members of our community and as parents to continue to call out bullying. It is up to us to stand up for those who cannot or who do not feel that they can speak up. First and foremost, it is up to parents to teach their children to be respectful, kind and caring to others, to guide them to make good decisions, and to help them learn about what it means to be a good friend. That is a very good start. Parents need to have good communication with their children so that children feel that they can talk about what is actually going on. We need to ensure from a school perspective that there are strong and consistent consequences to respond to bullying. We need to ensure that positive

Hon Samantha Rowe; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Colin Tincknell

anti-bullying and resilience-type programs are embedded in every school. There must be a whole-of-school focus on it, and it starts when a child first enters kindy and learns, as I said, how to be a good friend, and builds empathy and resilience. All that is critical, and that cannot start early enough.

I will quote again from Maggie Dent, because I like her—she is great. She says —

... to change human behaviour you need more than a one-hour-a-week program that lasts a term. The message that bullying is unacceptable must be embedded within a school culture that focuses equally on academic growth and building emotional and social competence within an inclusive caring school environment.

To torment, to intimidate, to harass or to threaten another human being, whether inside or outside the school walls, should never be accepted. We need to ensure that children who are bullied are supported and cared for. We need to ensure that their family and caregivers are also supported and are given the tools and support they need to help them work through those situations. Children should not feel terrified to go to school. Children should not feel terrified to check Facebook or Instagram, or whatever social media platform they use, on their iPhone to see whether another hateful message has been sent to them just as they are going to bed or when they wake up in the morning. Put simply, every child matters and we should, and must, have a zero tolerance approach to bullying irrespective of when, where or how it occurs.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Minister for Education and Training) [1.48 pm]: I will not take a lot of time because I appreciate that others want to make a contribution to this motion on bullying in schools. I begin by thanking Hon Samantha Rowe for the work she has done at my request on this issue. The result will be helpful to parents. There is a difference between children taking the normal development journey—learning how to resolve conflict and stand up for themselves, knowing what to ignore and what not to ignore—and bullying, which is deliberate and ongoing, and whether thoughtful or not, is done to cause hurt. Whether a young person thinks through the full consequences of the bullying when they are doing it, they cannot walk away from the fact that they know they have said something mean for the purpose of being mean. They know that. There is a difference between those two things. Good schools with strong leadership and a great school culture manage that, and they get the balance right. Whatever the program is, dealing with bullying appropriately is about the leadership and the culture in the school. There are a range of programs that could be used. The advice of Donna Cross or Maggie Dent is equally valuable, but both of them would say—Hon Donna Faragher pointed out that Maggie Dent did say—it is about the culture and the leadership of the school.

I want to preface my remarks by saying that I visit hundreds of schools, and most of them are doing a really good job on tackling this issue. However, it is frustrating for me, as I am sure it is for many members in this place, to hear the examples of where it is not going well. I want to give members a couple of examples. I remember talking to a grandmother whose adolescent daughter was being bullied on Facebook. It was happening outside of school hours, but it was being done by other girls in the school. The response of the school was that because it was happening out of hours on social media, it was not its place to intervene. If it was happening during school hours, the school would deal with it, but because it was happening after hours, even though it involved students from the school, the school said that it was not its place to intervene. That is not an acceptable response. Equally unacceptable is when the victim is told that they need to change their behaviour. The victim is told that they need to spend lunchtimes in the library so that they are isolated from the individual or individuals who are doing the bullying. That is not acceptable either as a sole solution.

Recently, I have had two very distressing telephone conversations. One was with the mother of an 11-year-old boy who has just switched schools because of the impact that sustained bullying has had on him and his mental health. That involved a public school in the western suburbs. The other conversation was with the father of a 17-year-old from a very highly regarded private school along Stirling Highway. The 17-year-old had committed suicide at the end of a period of sustained bullying that the family did not know about. These were deeply distressing phone calls, but they wrote to me letters of such deep distress that I felt I could not just send them a letter in response; I needed to speak to them directly. I am glad that I did. They are truly awful sets of circumstances.

Although both these situations are at the extreme end of what can happen when bullying is sustained, they reinforced in my mind the importance of asking Hon Samantha Rowe to do a piece of work around resources to help parents find their way and to identify good practice and case studies of when this issue has been handled really well. We will say more about this on Friday. We need to be vigilant about bullying, and Hon Donna Faragher is right: we need to call it out when it happens.

Most people do not know that politicians work behind the scenes, without making a fuss in this place, to get things done, irrespective of what party we are in. When I was in opposition and Hon Peter Collier was the Minister for Education, there would be occasions when I would ring his office and say, “There is this issue that I am not interested in taking to the media, I am not interested in raising in the Parliament, I just think we need to get it fixed.” He would ensure that his office assisted to get it fixed. Hon Donna Faragher has come to me on a couple of

occasions to get similar things fixed, as have other members—mostly members in the lower house—and I try to get things fixed. Unfortunately, many of those things are around this issue of bullying. Parents are at their wit's end to know how to engage with their school, across the spectrum of schools, to tackle this issue. It is clear to me that parents need assistance, and they are looking for and are asking for that assistance, to help them work their way through the system to address these issues.

There is a difference between children going through their normal developmental journey, learning how to be resilient and how to resolve conflict, and ongoing and sustained abusive behaviour, which is what bullying is. I do not accept the argument that this whole debate is all about helicopter parents trying to ensure that nothing negative ever happens in the life of their child. Good schools with strong school cultures and strong leadership know that that is not what real bullying is about. They know the difference and how to get the balance right. I am confident that most schools do a sensational job in managing all the issues they are expected to deal with these days, but we can do better when it comes to ensuring that all schools across the sector are consistent in their response to bullying, and that parents are provided with the assistance that they need.

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [1.55 pm]: I want to thank the member for raising this issue. It is a very important one, and I think it is unsurprising that there are so many people indicating that they want to speak, because it is an issue that absolutely deserves the full attention of this house. I note that the motion is also a very timely one. As has already been said, this Friday is the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence, which is held on the third Friday of March every year, and I note that the theme for this year is “Bullying. No way! Take action every day”.

As has already been discussed, the consequences of bullying and the harm associated with it have been well documented. Bullying does have a lasting effect on children and their families and can have an ongoing impact on children's mental health and wellbeing, as well as their physical health. Bullying also impacts school attendance and can therefore be detrimental to school achievement. There is clear evidence that being a victim of bullying is associated with poor mental health and a high risk of depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal ideation. As has already been said by the minister, prolonged bullying can also be fatal, and we are aware of tragic cases when sustained bullying has led a young person to take their own life. Unfortunately, bullying is also very common. According to headspace, up to 46.8 per cent of Australian secondary school students report that they have been bullied in some form or another over the past 12 months.

I want to concentrate on a few elements of this, because although anyone can be a victim of bullying, some children can be particularly vulnerable. I am talking about students with disability, Aboriginal students, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, and also LGBTIQ students, all of whom have been identified as being at increased risk. The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission reports that bullying is a significant and widespread problem for students with disability, with six out of 10 of those students reporting that they have been bullied because of their disability. Young people with disability have been known to have poorer mental health than other young people, and recent research has found that almost half of their poorer mental health outcomes can be directly attributed to the bullying that they are experiencing. There is a real imperative to address bullying in this cohort of students. Studies have also found that LGBTIQ young people may face up to twice as much abuse or violence as other students, and 80 per cent of homophobic bullying occurs at school. These statistics are very confronting. I know from my own experiences as a student at John Curtin Senior High School that the boys who were dance students were subject to very serious ongoing physical bullying, whether they were gay or not. People said that they were gay because they danced. It was endemic and horrendous and I sincerely hope that is not the case now. In fact, I imagine it has changed significantly, but I remember how awful it was.

I am pleased to note that there are now some quite significant things happening in the space for LGBTIQ students. The Commissioner for Children and Young People has established advisory committees that focus specifically on the needs of LGBTIQ children and young people in Western Australia. Many of the key priority areas identified by this group relate to making schools safer, including improving experiences in school through inclusive policies, practices and professional development for staff; reducing harassment and discrimination for LGBTIQ children and young people; and improving access to safe spaces and support, and events and activities. I think these are really commendable initiatives.

Other positive steps forward have been taken, such as the drive for gender-neutral toilet options in schools—almost like what we have in our own homes—and efforts to ensure school ball dress policies are more inclusive. These initiatives stand in stark contrast to the often appalling media response to the issue. I particularly note the disgraceful front page from a couple of weeks ago about the school gender swap. I certainly hope that that young child has been receiving the support that she needs because, as we know, 50 per cent of transgender young children reported that they have attempted suicide. It is a really serious issue. It also highlights the importance of programs

such as Safe Schools and why we need to ensure that these programs are in place. These sorts of programs save lives and we really need to remember that.

I think it is appalling that being Aboriginal also increases a student's risk of being bullied at school. The situation is getting worse rather than better, with bullying being increasingly identified by Aboriginal respondents to Mission Australia's youth survey as a key issue that Australians face. Bullying of Aboriginal students been found to not only impact on their school attendance and progress, which is particularly concerning given efforts to address the gap in education between Aboriginal students and other students, but also contribute to children having trouble making friends and their willingness to take part in sport and leisure activities.

As I have said, bullying is also more commonly experienced by children from non-English speaking backgrounds. A survey undertaken by the Foundation for Young Australians found that 80 per cent of secondary students from non-Anglo backgrounds, most of whom were from migrant and refugee backgrounds, experienced racial discrimination during their lives and that over two-thirds of these experiences of racism occurred at schools.

As has been mentioned, there can be a tendency to attribute normal childhood nasty behaviour to bullying when it is not. Bullying is repeated, intentional behaviour that is intended to cause distress. We talk about the four different types of bullying: physical, verbal, cyber and social, or relational, such as excluding someone, telling others not to be friends with them, spreading rumours or embarrassing someone in public. All schools are required to have anti-bullying plans in place to deal with bullying and cyberbullying. Anti-bullying plans are sometimes called managing student behaviour plans. If I click on the page, "Preventing and managing bullying in schools" on the Department of Education's website, it says, "There is currently no information relating to this subject", which I think needs to be rectified. Having said that, I acknowledge that there is information about bullying on other parts of the department's website.

I want to make some general comments about parents. I absolutely agree with comments that have been made about the need to ensure that parents have the tools to be able to best address issues of bullying that occur against their children. As a mother of three, it is an area of which I would be greatly vigilant. However, not all children who are being bullied have the resource of parents who give a damn about them. There are parents who are absent or have died and sometimes kids are absolutely left unto themselves. We have to acknowledge that, far too often, some of the most bullied children are also the ones who have nobody who gives a damn about them and nobody who is looking out for them.

The fact that bullying rates are so high clearly indicates that our schools are not yet safe spaces for all students. It is, of course, vital that we develop strategies to prevent and manage bullying in schools. Schools need to be caring, positive environments that celebrate diversity in all its forms. That means school staff need to be equipped with the skills they need to be able to support all students, particularly those who we know are more vulnerable to bullying. I am pleased to note there are strategies and programs have been evaluated and demonstrated to be effective. In 2017, the New South Wales Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation undertook a comprehensive review of literature on effective anti-bullying programs in schools. The review found that anti-bullying programs reduce bullying by an average of 20 to 23 per cent. The most effective anti-bullying interventions take a holistic, whole-of-school and whole-of-community approach; allow students to develop social and emotional competencies and learn appropriate ways to respond to bullying; and provide professional development for staff. The most effective programs also ensure systematic implementation and evaluation. Although the report noted that there are a range of effective whole-of-school anti-bullying approaches, researchers identified that schools need greater support to maximise the outcomes of anti-bullying interventions and identify what is likely to be successful based on their specific contexts and requirements. It is simply not enough to provide a range of anti-bullying resources to schools and then just leave them to their own devices. Interventions need to take a whole-of-school approach, including teacher training, and support an inclusive school culture with individual counselling and policies, and plans for conflict resolution. In rolling out school-based anti-bullying initiatives, it is absolutely essential to ensure a particular focus on students who have already been identified as being at greater risk of bullying. That includes concentrating on enhancing the inclusion of students at risk, as I have already mentioned. We know that these strategies work. Research has shown that, for example, where there are protective policies in place for LGBTIQ students, they are more likely to feel safe compared with those in schools without similar policies. These students are almost 50 per cent less likely to be physically abused at school, less likely to suffer other forms of homophobic abuse, less likely to self-harm and less likely to attempt suicide.

In addition to programs that aim to prevent bullying, we also need to provide adequate support for children, including limiting their distress and preventing long-lasting difficulties in later life. It is appalling that one of the widely advertised first points of contact for children and young people who need urgent advice—Kids Helpline—is unable to meet demand and 56 per cent of calls do not get through. This is an area, for example, in which we are going to have to do better.

I want to talk about bullying and the issue of addressing violence in schools, because they are interlinked. Addressing violence in school is also very topical at the moment and I acknowledge the crossover between responding directly to violence and addressing bullying. Although not all school violence is related to bullying, we know that a significant amount is. Although programs that aim to prevent bullying must be an essential part of reducing violence in schools, we also need strategies to address violence when it happens. Of course, it goes without saying that students and staff should all be safe at school. It is not okay to be subject to violence. That being said, I am concerned about the minister's action plan to address school violence and the plan's potential to have unintended negative consequences, particularly for some of our most vulnerable students. I am concerned that the rhetoric around this plan allows no flexibility or understanding of individual circumstance. It is very disappointing that, other than mentioning that policy changes will not discriminate against students with disability, there is no recognition of the underlying reasons for students' behaviour. Our response to behavioural issues has to be appropriate and in the best interests of the child, and take into account underlying causes such as whether they are experiencing mental health issues, have a disability, or there are substance abuse issues or external stressors and traumas that might be happening in those children's lives. All of that will require different and tailored support; indeed, it would be great to see an interagency response where appropriate.

I note that yesterday the minister released a media statement titled "Violence policy at work in WA public schools", which identified that there has been a 700 per cent increase in the number of students who have been excluded from school. It stated that at this time last year, no student had been excluded from school and that seven had been excluded this year. It also promotes the statistics as a measure of success of the tough new measures. We know that engagement in education is a protective factor against suicide, particularly for troubled kids; likewise, disengagement is a very real risk factor. I think characterising the policy as a success based on the number of children excluded or expelled completely fails to take into account what is happening to those students, including, for example, those with problematic home lives and those who might not be able to travel to access other educational options.

Members, year 6 was a terrible, terrible year for me. At that time I had a very traumatic home life. My mother was gone, and my father was in and out of mental health institutions and during that time attempted suicide twice. In that six-month period, I was a tiny 10-year-old girl who was responsible for three acts of violence against my fellow students. I was called up to the principal. It was unusual for me. I was a minister's daughter. I had always been the teacher's pet; I was always really well behaved. There was no explanation that I was capable of giving as a tiny child for why I was behaving in such an appalling way. I wish someone had been able to ask at the time what was happening to me at home. It was very difficult for me to make sense of what was going on and it was very difficult for me to regulate my behaviour. It was not until my father did suicide that same year that perhaps people had some inkling of what was going on with me. My point is that sometimes kids do things that they would not otherwise do because of chaotic home lives—things that are completely out of their control. I am not happy that that is what happened for me, that I did that, but I am just saying that life is sometimes very complex for children.

I was contacted by a range of stakeholders following the minister's announcement that she would be developing the violence action plan. Those stakeholders were concerned that the plan would have unintended consequences, particularly for students with disabilities such as autism, and it was parents of children with autism in particular who raised those concerns. I raised this issue in questions without notice while the plan was being developed. Yet now, disappointingly, feedback from the schools is that school staff are being put under pressure to explain decisions, and not to suspend or exclude vulnerable students for behaviour that is clearly the result of significant underlying issues. It is clear that excluding a student in these circumstances is not only inappropriate, but also likely to have a significant long-term negative impact. I remind members that we are talking about children. They have a right to an education, but, further than that, they have a right to be protected from discrimination, and in all actions their best interests should be our primary consideration. So when a school becomes a place where young people experience trauma and harm, it has an immediate as well as a life-long impact. The social costs of bullying are absolutely considerable. I also note that the economic costs of bullying are also considerable and felt by the whole community. I note that economic analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Alannah and Madeline Foundation last year found that bullying in Australian schools has cost an estimated \$2.3 billion over 20 years for each school year group. Therefore, we know that anti-bullying initiatives make a significant difference. It is imperative that these programs are given the priority that they so clearly warrant. I would like to see outcomes like reduction in violence not only in schools, but also across the community longer term to be used as a measure of success of anti-bullying and anti-violence programs and that we do not measure success by the number of children who have been excluded from school. We have to get that balance right. I believe that we can strike the right balance by working to ensure that our schools are safe places for everyone, while also appropriately responding to the needs of vulnerable children.

Childhood is a complex time. Children do need to learn how to be resilient, but also parents need to not enable their children when they are bullies. We need to ensure that children who do not have present parents are able to get support and that schools are able to step in to support children when they do not have anyone else to protect

them. We also need to remember that even the students themselves, whether they are engaging in acts of violence or otherwise, may often have very deeply complex issues occurring in their own lives. This is why there is no one-size-fits-all solution. It is really important that we are able to identify those students who are at risk and who are experiencing trauma, and, ideally, be able to refer them to additional supports as soon as possible. Schools have the capacity to be our frontline resource for damaged children and children who are experiencing trauma. Schools can be the pathway to ensure that children do not go on to experience lifelong mental health issues or, indeed, take their own lives.

HON JACQUI BOYDE (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA) [2.15 pm]: I thank Hon Samantha Rowe for bringing this exceptionally important motion to the house today. Nobody in this house wants to see ongoing bullying of children in our schools. As parents, and aunts and uncles of young children, and indeed teenagers, bullying is something that we have all dealt with in our families, so I am very pleased to contribute to the debate today. I commend the government on the steps it has taken so far in implementing some strategies to address particular areas of violence in schools.

In addressing the motion today, which notes the importance of developing those strategies, we could have moved a step further by recognising the strategies that have been adopted so far. I support them, but I have some questions that I will highlight, particularly around how the 10-point plan will be delivered in regional areas. It is all fantastic and it is a strategy that would work in the metropolitan area. It seems to be very credible to me.

Hon Samantha Rowe: I don't want to interrupt you, but if there's time, I will reply. But the motion is not about the 10-point plan.

Hon JACQUI BOYDE: I know, but it is one of the strategies that will be adopted. Therefore, if the 10-point plan is a strategy that the government will be working with to combat bullying and violence in schools, I would like to understand how that will impact on regional schools in particular.

In talking about that action plan very quickly—I do not want to completely focus on it—I would like to understand the government's strategy to adopt strategies for actions 1, 3, 5, 7 and 10 in regional areas. Action 1 states —

Principals to suspend students who attack other students or start fights.

Nobody wants to see fighting in schools. It is abhorrent. Nor do they want to see the recording of fights, posting of fights on social media or children standing by and watching them. They are traumatic for anybody. I applaud the 10-point plan, so do not get me wrong, Hon Samantha Rowe. I absolutely support it. However—Hon Alison Xamon did touch on this, particularly in a regional situation—what happens when a child in a regional area is suspended from school? Where do they go? When that happens, it becomes a larger community issue. They say that it takes a village to raise a child, but how do communities support children who are in extremely violent situations and who require an enormous amount of support to be educated? How will they respond to that?

Hon Alison Xamon: And with absent parents.

Hon JACQUI BOYDE: Yes, it is often the case that their parents are absent. I acknowledge that, absolutely. I understand that there is suspension, but how do we provide ongoing support for those children and families, particularly in a regional setting where there are limited services to deal with those issues? Action 3 is headed "New alternative learning settings for the most violent students". What is that? Where can we do that in regional Western Australia? How will it be rolled out? How will the community know that these children are being engaged in an alternative learning setting? Action 5 is headed "Provide training and support for school staff". I absolutely support that initiative, but how will that be delivered in the regions? Action 7 is headed "Free parenting program for parents of young children". Again, what is the plan to roll out that program in a regional setting? Will that program possibly be extended to parents with teenage children, because often issues do not come to light until children are aged 11 to 12 years? At that point, parents actually need a different type of assistance, because the children are dealing with the issues we spoke about today—cyberbullying and overt and covert bullying within the school environment. Action 10 refers to the Premier's Youth Forum that will give young people an opportunity to have a voice and identify actions themselves to address violence in their community. I commend that plan, but I hope that opportunity is afforded to regional students as well. I hope that they will have an opportunity to come to the table, at the highest level, at the Premier's forum, to have those discussions and have the Premier and the minister listen to them about how we can implement change in a regional setting, because students and staff of regional schools probably understand schools in a regional setting better than anyone. Some insight into how the minister will deliver that forum would be great.

I commend the plan. I absolutely agree with it in principle. It is heartening that we have moved on as a society from when I, or some of us in this house, was going to school and incidents occurred, which would now be seen as bullying, but at the time may have been seen as character building or just boys being boys, or girls being girls, or the environment that students are in. That is not acceptable and there has to be some way to address the bullying

that people are feeling. We cannot ignore people's feelings; if people feel bullied, they can justifiably say that they have been bullied. I am very, very pleased that we can have this conversation and shine some light on behaviour that is actually bullying. I note, as other members have done, that this Friday, 15 March, is the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence. I would like to place on the record my support for that initiative, with the hope of encouraging all facets of our society to be kind and supportive of each other while we work together to reduce bullying and the harm that it creates. I think we, as members of Parliament, have a unique opportunity to do that in the way that we engage with each other.

I note the statistics released by the Minister for Education and Training yesterday in her press release, which are astounding. The incidence of violence and bullying in our schools and the very high percentage of people who feel they have been bullied is alarming. I commend the minister on her plan of action against bullying.

I would like to share the definition of "bullying" set out on the Bullying. No Way! website. It is interesting to read and take note of what bullying is. It is easy to see bullying as violent, overt, loud or aggressive behaviour, but it is a number of behaviours. Sometimes people need to read a definition in order to recognise that their behaviour is actually acting out a form of bullying. The website states —

Bullying is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening.

Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and it can be obvious ... or hidden ... Bullying behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (for example, through sharing of digital records)

The many different research papers and discussions on this issue and studies on this topic vary slightly but most are in agreement that between 25 and 45 per cent of students indicate that they have been bullied at school at some stage in their life. That is a frightening statistic we would all like to see reduced. Unfortunately, we also see the prevalence of bullying in many adult workplaces. Those numbers are far too high. The government needs to move from, as said in the motion, noting this issue's importance to actually developing strategies, which it has started to do, and providing ongoing support for those strategies to continue to be delivered in our schools.

The bullying we see now is evolving. Bullies have realised that they will be caught for any overt bullying strategy, because everyone has a camera on their phone these days; do they not? We are now seeing different behaviour from bullies. The covert bully has started to evolve in our schools. These bullies inflict damage silently, often in the most hurtful manner. In schools, we see students experience looks that make victims feel constantly uncomfortable or a group of students turn their backs on a victim approaching them to engage in a social setting, which ostracises and isolates that student. That isolation of young people is heartbreaking and soul destroying. At lunchtime closing a circle when a student walks up to them and not allowing them to sit down is bullying; it is isolating and ridiculing people. It is not overt but still undermines their very soul. It is exceptionally disheartening to see that happen.

The incidence of cyberbullying, as other members have talked about today, has increased in recent years. The devastating impact upon students includes the incidence of suicides after sustained cyberbullying, which is sadly becoming a reality. This was highlighted, in particular, by the devastating case of Dolly Everett. Without strong action in this area from all stakeholders, I fear we will see only increases in the number of children and teenagers who can no longer stand the barrage of assaults that comes with cyberbullying and will devastatingly feel that suicide is the only option.

Although the government has to some extent addressed overt bullying—I agree with that entirely—I think there is a way to go on addressing covert bullying in which particular groups of children strategically get together and seek to isolate and ostracise children. The children feel completely alone and that they cannot share their experience with their parents, teachers, mentors, aunts or uncles. As adults in that situation, we need strategies and coping mechanisms to support our young people. The 10-point plan provides some of that support, and that is a great thing.

I want to talk about my electorate in particular. My electorate of Mining and Pastoral Region is very large. The schools in my electorate vary, not only in size, but also in student and staff capability. They are very open about that, because they are all working in the interests of the kids at their school and the community in which they participate. They all want to improve the service they are providing to their students and their families. They all face very different and often difficult challenges in providing a safe and inclusive space in which to educate their students. If a student who lives in Perth or the wider metropolitan area has an issue with feeling safe at school or with bullying at school and their family is determined to move that student to another school, that option is available to them, and they should take up that option. However, parents in regional communities do not

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necessarily have a school in a suburb next door to which they can move their child. Parents in regional communities are also often economically attached to the community in which they live, because that is where their job is, so they are torn between trying to provide for their family and trying to provide a safe and appropriate school environment for their children. That is not solely the problem of government; it is due to the geography of our state. However, it means that parents and students in regional areas have limited options.

I go back to the question that I asked at the beginning of my contribution to this debate, namely: how is the government seeking to provide alternatives, not only for victims of bullying, but also for children who inflict bullying behaviour on other students? It is not good enough to simply suspend or expel those students and let them run amok on the streets. Those students could be living next door to me or another member or someone in our community. If as a community we do not provide those students with ongoing assistance, we cannot expect those children to grow into healthy, community-minded young adults. There are some gaps in that area. In regional areas, expulsion is certainly not an answer. We need to provide alternatives in the form of education support, emotional and psychological support, and family support. That presents real challenges for parents and families in regional areas.

I will be watching this space and how the 10-point plan will be further rolled out. The government may have some strategies within its 10-point plan to address the concerns of parents and students in regional areas. I look forward to that becoming available. The government demonstrated in its decision-making processes on Schools of the Air, camp schools and Moora Residential College, and in its lack of funding for a number of schools in my electorate, that it does not have a true understanding of the challenges faced in education and by educators in the regions. I suspect that when we get more detail about the strategies that this government has put in place, we might see some further development of that. I hope that is right, because I welcome the opportunity to work with the government to further develop opportunities for educators and parents and children in regional areas. I am happy to be proved wrong and that the government does understand regional education. I am happy to be part of the process to assist the government to further work towards strategies that will be in the interests of regional students. I am happy for the 10-point plan to be rolled out in regional areas, and even in our regional centres would be a start. Children in regional Western Australia deserve the same support and quality education as children in the metropolitan area. It would be fantastic to see that as a principal priority of this government.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [2.34 pm]: I say at the outset that I will definitely be supporting this motion, and I thank Hon Samantha Rowe for bringing it to the chamber.

Pedagogy is a fascinating element of our community and our society. Having spent 23 years in the classroom, without a day off, as a secondary teacher in the private system, in both a boys' school and a girls' school, and in the public education system, I can attest to that. I loved every second of it. However, having said that, pedagogy has shifted significantly from the time I had my education in Kalgoorlie—I will not say how many years ago, but many years ago. In those days, and until about 25 years ago, the fundamentals of our education system were always to best prepare the child for life beyond compulsory education in not only skills and qualifications, but also resilience and self-esteem. Those fundamentals have never changed. Every education system should generate towards that positive outcome. However, that has changed significantly. Gone are the days when the whole of the fundamentals of education were based on curriculum. As I said, back in the 1970s when I graduated, and until the late 1980s, the fundamentals of education were almost exclusively generated towards the academic component. There was a minuscule amount of pastoral care. Pastoral care was basically detention on a Friday afternoon, when the bad kids were sent out of the classroom and into detention, and that was it.

We are living in an increasingly complex society, and that is creating profound challenges for our education system. Children now bring a multitude of issues to school every single day, right across the length and breadth of the social spectrum of our community, with drug abuse, single-parent families, relationship breakdowns, transient populations, and economic circumstances that prevail negatively on families. Children are faced with constant issues. The school environment today is much more complex than it was in the past. Bullying is one of the most profound issues that our schools have to deal with. It is not just the norm. It is not what has always been expected of bullies—that they will push, hit or bash up their adversaries. Make no bones about it. I am not talking about the usual suspects. Bullies nowadays are much more sophisticated. They use their sinister mechanisms in a variety of ways, no more significantly than through social media and cyberbullying. The depth to which bullies will go to diminish the self-esteem of their peers is extraordinary. Let us not forget that it is not just the children in our schools. It transcends our community. All we need to do is look at the posts and vile that comes out of Twitter. It is ironic that we have the audacity to pass moral judgement on our children, when grown adults behave in that way as well. Those values transcend our education system. Therefore, our education system needs to rise to the occasion. Imagine what it would be like for an eight-year-old boy or a 14-year-old girl to be told you are ugly or you are fat, or you are this or that; go and kill yourself. However, this happens day in and day out. Make no bones about it. Tens of thousands of students in our classrooms right now are suffering in silence, I promise you, all because someone has disowned them or unfriended them on Facebook, or their peers have isolated them because

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they did not turn up to a party or did not invite them to a party. Dolly Everett, a beautiful 14-year-old girl, was completely ostracised, alienated and condemned by her peers to the degree that she was in such a dark space that that young lady took her own life. Is that not compelling? Is it not a terrible indictment of where we are as a community that that child felt so isolated that she took her own life at 14 years of age? She is one of thousands. Make no bones about it.

One of the choice posts on her Facebook page was: “Why don’t you just go and cut your wrists until you bleed. You’ll do everyone a favour.” That is shocking. That is what our schools have to deal with day in and day out.

Let us have a look at bullying in the old sense. I acknowledge the work the government has done on coming down hard on those who engage in physical bullying. I support that; I have no problem with that at all. But make no bones about it: those who engage in physical bullying are the thin edge of the wedge. I know that about 900 or so of these students have been suspended, excluded or expelled up to this point in time, but I say to members opposite that the vast majority of them will be repeat offenders. It is not 900 individual cases; they will be repeat offenders. These kids will have been in a lot of very, very dark places. They are repeat offenders. As I said, as a lifelong educator, I am not convinced that expelling or excluding these students really does them much good at all. A lot of these kids have a lot of social issues. They wear it as a badge of honour—they honestly do—which is a shame. They will say, “I’m off again!” They will go and take some drinks from the IGA store or wherever it might be and do a whole raft of other things, but does that improve them as an individual? Does it develop their self-esteem or resilience? No, it does not. I am not advocating against it; all I am saying is that if we are going to isolate these students, we have to provide something for them. I will get to that in a moment in terms of some of the mechanisms we introduced in government, which have been retained by the current government.

As I said, they are the thin edge of the wedge. Most bullying is not overt physical action by one child against another. That is unacceptable and, yes, those children need to be isolated in some shape or form, because we have to look after all the children. It is not just the bullies; we also have to look after the victims, because their self-esteem has been challenged as well. But let us not forget that the vast majority of the bullying in our school environments comes from those who do it online or through isolation.

Hon Samantha Rowe: When I spoke to Professor Donna Cross, she actually said that more bullying happens face to face than online.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Who said this?

Hon Samantha Rowe: Professor Donna Cross from the Telethon Kids Institute. That is from her research.

Hon PETER COLLIER: She perhaps needs to get back into the classroom. I have no problem with that; I am not diminishing her views. All I am saying is that online bullying is absolutely rampant in our schools. Having been education minister for six years and having visited almost 700 schools, I can assure the member that it is a cancerous problem within our school environment. Of course, responsibility for that should not rest on the shoulders of the schools themselves; it is a community responsibility. It really bugs me, and I know it must bug the current education minister, when people go on the radio and carry on about schools not doing this or that. I would really like to see a little parental responsibility every now and then in some of these issues. Parents need to take a bit more responsibility for the actions of their children. But it must be a holistic approach. It should not be just the schools and it should not be just the parents; it should be the community as a whole. Collectively, we have to do something to engender within our society a culture that is supportive and ensures that everyone works towards those two key principles of resilience and self-esteem within our children. We can look at ATAR scores et cetera, but it is no good someone getting an ATAR score of 98 if they have massive self-esteem issues, because those issues will fundamentally undermine that individual’s success.

As education minister, I was insistent on the provision of a holistic approach to bullying strategies. Yes, we did look at that thin edge—those children who engage in physical bullying. There is a significant number. Most are repeat offenders. This is historical. Members should not get too excited when the numbers go up and say that it shows that their policies are working or whatever, because most of them are repeat offenders; it is the same kids. We need to look after that cohort of students. When I took over as education minister, we had what were called behaviour centres, which basically isolated the students. The students would spend a couple of days in these behaviour centres. I said that was fine, but it was like putting a bandaid on a broken arm—it does not really solve the problem. I said that if these kids had issues, we needed to help them develop the life skills they needed to better socialise with their peers. I expanded those behaviour centres and changed the name—I did not like the name at all, because, again, it was just like a badge of honour for these kids. I made them engagement centres. There was not one in the wheatbelt or the Kimberley, so I put one in both those areas. I wanted the centres to develop much more tailored programs for each student who went to them—they might be there for two to three weeks—to empower that child and make him feel better. There is nothing better in life than success, particularly for a child. For that child to develop an awareness of things he had not done before, to develop some literacy and numeracy

skills or some geography skills or whatever it might be, would enhance the esteem of that child. I was very happy with the fact that those engagement centres offered a lot more to children than just a punitive approach of pulling them out of school and plonking them in the centre for a couple of days, which did not teach them anything and meant they would continue to do the same thing. We are all creatures of habit. They would just keep on doing it. As I said, the idea was to say, “What can you work with?” It worked.

We also opened a learning academy in Midland for the very high-order students who really have issues with socialising with their peers. We went to the last election with a promise of two more—one in the north metropolitan area and one in south metro. I really hope we can get those one day. Some students are increasingly disengaged from mainstream schooling and we need to look after them. I did that myself. I based that on the curriculum and re-engagement in education schools model. These schools are independent, non-government schools that deal specifically with disengaged students. A lot have been in juvenile justice. A lot are from very broken homes. I love those schools; I spend so much time with them. Back in 2008, when I was shadow education minister in opposition, the then government actually cut their funding, which really did not impress me. We committed to increasing that funding to make up that shortfall. We won government in 2008—I do not know how, but we did. Even though I did not become education minister then, we were fortunately able to provide more funding for those CARE schools so that they could retain their level of funding. They deal with hundreds upon hundreds of seriously disengaged students. They are wonderful. Members should go out there. There were eight when I started; there are 13 now. I do not know whether they have expanded. There are more campuses but there are 13 fundamental CARE schools. They teach the kids a whole raft of life skills. They deal with them one on one, providing psychology support and peer support et cetera. They are great. They are so good. These kids really do well. They might get a certificate II or something. I would go out to make the presentations. You want to give a kid who has not had too many positives in his life a cert II in jewellery making at the age of 15 or 16, and to watch their gleaming faces and see how wonderful it is. There is just that little seed: “I’m not a loser. I can do something.” It really does help that child. These students are right at the edge of the wedge and would, more often than not, be the perpetrators of what has traditionally been regarded as physical bullying. They are taken out of school, but they have to be given something; we need to engender something in them that is life changing, so that they do not just sit back and assume that this is the way it has always been. Members can bet their bottom dollar that most of the students in the CARE schools who have been in juvenile justice would not go to a mainstream school, and if they did, they would not last two weeks. They would be incarcerated just after they turned 18. This is a fact, guys. A lot of the students in the CARE schools are from the juvenile justice system. Members need to look at the positive work they are doing; it is magnificent.

There was also the chaplaincy program. I told YouthCARE when I was in opposition that my goal was to put a chaplain into every school that wanted one. I was bashed by the usual subjects, who carried on about whether there should be chaplains in schools, but I wear it proudly. For some reason, people have this misguided notion that chaplains in our schools are sent there to read the Bible to students, and that is all they do, but nothing could be further from the truth. Chaplains provide a wonderful vehicle for pastoral care. Some students who have real social issues at home, with relationships, peers, or whatever it might be, do not feel comfortable talking to the school psychologist, and being assessed. They do not like talking to their head of house, the head of their year group or the deputy. In some instances they do not even like talking to their parents about things. The compassionate role that chaplains play is absolutely formidable. I doubled the number of chaplains in our schools so that, by the time I left, every school that wanted a chaplain had one. I am so proud of that. Never once, in the entire time I was minister, did any school say that it did not want its chaplain any more. Dozens of schools wanted them, and when the federal government—a federal Liberal government, I might add—withdrawed its funding for the chaplains, in my second last year as minister, 2016, we filled the gap and propped up the program to ensure that not only were the existing chaplains retained but also 188 new chaplains were appointed, which has been very successful.

In addition, it is absolutely vital that we engage with parents, so that the parents are part of the process and when children suffer or are struggling, the parents feel that they are part of their child’s development. The development of the child and parent centres commenced at the end of the previous government in 2007, and we introduced them in 2008, and expanded their role significantly. Initially they were for developing literacy and numeracy skills and providing mental health assistance, but I expanded their role to include much more in the way of parenting workshops, so that the parents were part of the child’s development. Let us not forget that all those child and parent centres are in low socioeconomic areas, and they engage with tens of thousands of students every week. Additionally, the 37 Aboriginal KindiLink centres that we opened when I was minister provided an avenue for support for Aboriginal parents in 37 primary schools, and were allocated to a raft of other primary schools. Again, I was trying to get the parents involved in their children’s education. The kids at the door is not my responsibility; the parents are responsible.

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A number of the strategies that we used—the engagement centres, the learning academy, the additional support for the care schools, the chaplaincy program and the KindiLink program—were very successful. In addition, there is the independent public schools program, under which parents were very much a part of decision-making in their school environment. It is absolutely vital, to overcome the scourge of bullying, that the entire community is a part of it. That is why I was insistent that, in independent public schools, parents had a say in the ethos, the culture and the values of the school. Fundamentally, that is what it is all about—a rich tapestry, with everyone working together. Isolating the bullies who hit the other kids and get great value out of physical violence is a good thing in a way, because it gets the child out of that environment in the short term. However, as I said, unless we do something with that child to develop their life skills, it is putting a bandaid on a broken arm.

That is where we are at in the area of bullying. We have an issue at the moment, because it transcends all areas of society, not just the school environment. The schools are a microcosm of our society. While we are out there bashing each other up on social media, we can hardly pass value judgements on our students who are doing the same. Ideally, if we all work together, we can start to make that message consistent and effective. Our education system is the one real opportunity we have to prepare our students for life beyond compulsory education, both academically and in developing self-esteem and resilience. Collectively, that is the way to go to overcome the scourge of bullying.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [2.55 pm]: I will make a short presentation here, because I am very keen to hear others speak as well. I have learnt a lot from the speakers today, so I commend Hon Samantha Rowe for bringing this subject to the house. What I have heard today is very good. I have heard what the previous government did, and now we are starting to hear what the current government is looking at doing. However, if we put our faith only in governments and schools to get rid of this problem, I fear that we will fail. It is a societal problem, and, as Hon Peter Collier put it, the schools and the students are just reacting to what parents and other people do in general society.

Society can be changed in a couple of ways—through prevention and culture—but it is hard work. We have heard those words mentioned already today. How do we create culture? It is not very easy. A lot of kids at school would not actually understand what culture means, and the value of culture. Obviously, some of the private schools have it ingrained. The kids arrive and they are given a rundown on how that school operates, and the behaviour that is acceptable. Generally within the first few weeks they understand what the culture is and what is acceptable. It is a bit different at government schools. Some government schools work very well in trying to build a culture, but all people have a part to play in that. Obviously, the parents have the number one role. The behaviour of their children is totally their responsibility. How do we make people better parents? From the schoolyard, or from the government, we cannot. It is up to the parents, and they have a major role to play.

In a prevention sense, in preparing students when they arrive at school, we should let them know that they will be subject to bullying. I think a lot of schools are too scared to mention that from day one, because they want to put their school in a good light, so talking about the darker side of things that happen in schools is not something they want to promote. I worked in schools for the last 21 years before I became a member of Parliament, and it is important that we prepare everyone for what they are going to face. That is one way that we can beat bullying—prepare the students for what they will be facing. In the old days, we said things like, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me.” It was a pretty strong message when I was a kid, and it did not really mean much to me, but as I got older I realised what it meant. Sometimes, we do not prepare our kids when we send them off to school. We are thinking the school has the situation in hand, with experts, psychiatrists, and experienced teachers. Surely the school has that under control—but no, it is the responsibility of parents. When they send their children off to school, they are ultimately responsible for how those children react to the bullying that is going to happen. I have a child who was bullied, but once we see a child being bullied, how are we going to react and handle that issue?

Prevention can be done in many ways. We have heard about cyberbullying. One obvious method of prevention would be to ban mobile phones or those sorts of apparatus in schools. Maybe kids should hand in their mobile phones when they arrive at school and then pick them up when they leave. Obviously, if they were sick and had to go, they could get access to their phone to ring their parents and get them to pick them up. That is one method of prevention. I am not saying that it is the answer, but it is one thing that could help. Kids would not have access to their mobile phones during lunchtime and they would have to communicate with each other face to face. They would not have the use of a smart phone to continue the bullying in the classroom or at lunchtime.

People who belong to a great sporting outfit often pride themselves on the culture of the club. Why does the team have success? It is not just the ability of the team; the expertise of the players and the coaches is only one part. A team can have the greatest players and coaches, but it will not have success if it does not have the greatest culture. That is why I come back to the word “culture”. It is important that schools lay out the rules to students from day one when they arrive and prepare them for the bullying that will come.

It was really good to hear from the previous education minister about what his government did and some of its successful programs. I was not aware of that. I am very pleased that the current education minister has kept those programs going. Of course, federal governments will come in and muck it up, but it was good that this government had the money to put aside to continue those programs.

The other thing I would like to touch on is authority. Teachers and headmasters today are under threat from parents and students. We have seen the horrible violence towards teachers. Over the last 20 or 30 years, we have all had a role in undermining the authority of teachers and headmasters. Society has asked for a different way to approach this. When I went to school, I never, ever spoke back to a teacher. I would not even speak to the headmaster or headmistress if they spoke to me. They were held in high esteem; in those days, they were held well above lawyers and doctors in our society. That is not the respect that teachers, headmasters and people working in the education system get from society these days. Society has a role to play in ensuring that teachers are looked up to. They perform probably the second most vital role that can be performed for a child—that is, teaching that child, and not just teaching them education. If a teacher goes to school thinking that he will be involved just in the education process, he will have to learn very quickly. On his first day at school, he may have a kid who has been bashed on the way to school and whose mum is in jail and whose dad has been raped. Who knows what has gone on in that kid's life that morning. Teachers have to face that every day. We have to prepare our teachers and students. We need to build a culture.

I will not go on, because I want to give the member a chance to respond. I thank the member for bringing this motion to the house. It has been valuable to me. I have learnt a lot. She will get our support for this motion.

HON SAMANTHA ROWE (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [3.03 pm] — in reply: Firstly, I thank all members who made contributions to today's debate. I pretty much agree with everything that Hon Donna Faragher said. It was great to have everyone in the chamber contribute. I also acknowledge that the Minister for Education and Training, Hon Sue Ellery, made a contribution. Hon Alison Xamon, as always, gave a very passionate and heartfelt contribution. I thank her for sharing some of the experiences that she has had in this space. Hon Jacqui Boydell raised a number of issues that are important to her in how the 10-point plan will affect regional schools. I cannot provide an answer to her today; I do not have that information with me. I was not referring to the 10-point plan in my contribution. Nevertheless, I totally take on board the issues that she raised and hopefully someone will be able to get answers for her in that space. I thank Hon Peter Collier for his contribution. Obviously, as a former education minister, he has a huge amount of experience in the education sector. I also thank Hon Colin Tincknell for his contribution.

A lot of issues were raised and I will not have time to address them all. Hon Colin Tincknell said that we need to have a change of culture and that making sure there is a strong school culture is very important. I totally agree. He asked how we do that, and I think it is by making sure that we have collective buy-in from all stakeholders—all the groups involved, including schools, parents and students. The culture can be changed, but it takes time. It is not something that will happen overnight, but there must be buy-in from all the parties involved. I think the member also said that we cannot eliminate bullying, and I agree that we cannot eliminate bullying.

Hon Colin Tincknell: It's human nature.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: It is human nature, but we can make sure that we have in place programs and tools to best support teachers and schools, because they are at the forefront of this. We can make sure that programs, tools and resources are available for parents so that they better understand how to deal with these highly emotional and stressful situations. We can also make sure that we have tools and support for students so that young people know where to go for help.

Hon Colin Tincknell: I don't want them to wait until the bullying has started; it needs to be well prepared and in advance.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: I do not disagree. Some of the best examples in our public school system can be seen in the whole-of-school approach to ensuring that there is a strong anti-bullying policy. When we have had that buy-in from all stakeholders, there has been less incidence of bullying. Obviously, if there is strong leadership and a strong school culture, it can be prevented from happening at the beginning. Obviously, prevention is always better than the cure.

Hon Donna Faragher said that we always need to look at new ideas and new ways to deal with issues in this space, and I agree, particularly with cyberbullying. For some of us, it is a new space to be involved in. It is kind of terrifying for people to get their head around what can happen with cyberbullying on social media and to try to understand how it occurs and how parents and other adults can assist young people to navigate social media. We cannot ban them from using it. It is a part of their life. It is how they communicate with their peers and their friends. If we try to ban them from using it, we will make it worse for them; they will be isolated from a very important part of their life. It is about teaching them how to use it safely, and to teach them how to use it safely, we need to

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understand how to navigate that space. I imagine that will keep changing over time. I am not sure whether that is what Hon Donna Faragher was referring to when she spoke about new ideas and making sure that we constantly address this issue. New things will keep coming up and we need to ensure that what we have in place is current and works effectively for all the different stakeholders who are affected by bullying in our society.

Hon Alison Xamon mentioned that bullying has long-lasting effects on individuals and she said that we need to understand that a number of individuals in society are more vulnerable. She is absolutely right. One of the comments that the Commissioner for Children and Young People made to me when I had a meeting with him about bullying is that kids need to have three really important relationships in their life. The first is with family, the second is with a teacher and the third is with their peers or their friends. If children can start out with those three core relationships, the likelihood is higher that they will not be bullied at school or be the bully. That is not always the case for everyone so we need to make sure that we look out for those who are more vulnerable in our schools. I am really glad Hon Alison Xamon highlighted that in her contribution. I thank members of the house for their support of the motion and all their contributions. They were really worthwhile.

Question put and passed.