Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Education**

Your ref	:	
Our ref	:	D17/0426051
Enquiries	:	

Mr Timothy Watling
Committee Secretary
The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA   ACT   2600

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Dear Mr Watling

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the inquiry into the adequacy of existing offences in the Commonwealth Criminal Code and of state and territory criminal laws to capture cyberbullying.

Please find attached the Department of Education's submission, which identifies measures taken to minimise cyberbullying in the context of public schools.

Copies of any documents and/or polices referenced in the Department's submission are available on request from Ms Catherine Shepherd, Director, Student Support Services. Ms Shepherd can be contacted on   or at

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry. The Department remains committed to strengthening school responses to cyberbullying and looks forward to the inquiry's findings.

Yours sincerely

SHARYN O'NEILL
DIRECTOR GENERAL

16 OCT 2017

Att.

151 Royal Street, East Perth, Western Australia 6004

ATTACHMENT 1

SUBMISSION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Inquiry into the adequacy of existing offences in the Commonwealth Criminal Code and of State and Territory criminal laws to capture cyberbullying

Department of Education, Western Australia
The Western Australian Department of Education will be commenting on measures used to combat cyberbullying predominantly between school children and young people [term of reference (d)].

The Department of Education is Western Australia's largest public sector employer with approximately 45 000 staff deployed across more than 800 worksites. The Department provides a system of public schools that aims to ensure every school is a good school, every teacher is effective and every student is successful.

Summary of submission
The Department's submission focuses on:
- educating children and young people about staying safe online and using technology positively; and
- addressing cyberbullying in the school context.

Educating children and young people
The Department recognises the critical importance of educating children and young people about staying safe online and using technology positively.

Students learn about concern for others and their rights, which is a core value of the curriculum taught in Western Australian schools. Schools also play an important role in supporting the development of students' skills, knowledge and understandings in the area of resilience and wellbeing through building healthy, respectful and positive relationships.

Public schools are provided with information about cyber safety and how to support students via the Department's website and through professional learning events such as seminars for the National Day of Action against bullying and violence. These seminars are aimed at school staff and include speakers from organisations with expertise in the area of bullying, including cyberbullying, and digital citizenship. The topic of the 2017 seminar was on promoting child safe schools through student wellbeing and online safety.

The Department works collaboratively with the Telethon Kids Institute and University of Western Australia on a number of initiatives to research and promote cyber safety practices. The Department also promotes access to the online complaints system and a range of information and resources to prevent and respond to cyber safety issues developed by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.

Schools have also participated in a number of virtual classroom webinars provided by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner hosted on the Department's web conferencing platform.

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Schools have access to a range of resources through the *Bullying. No Way!* website, which is developed and managed through the Safe and Supportive School Communities (SSSC) Working Group, including whole school strategies, classroom activities and information for parents and children.

The SSSC Working Group, which includes representatives from the Commonwealth and all states and territories, as well as from the national Catholic and independent schooling sectors, provides a national forum for sharing research, practice and workable solutions to counter bullying, harassment and violence in schools. The role of the SSSC is to ensure all educational jurisdictions in Australia are working together to support schools to implement workable, evidence-informed solutions to bullying, harassment and violence.

Schools are encouraged to use programs and resources to benefit students, based on the best evidence available and according to the needs of the school. Schools can choose from a range of social emotional learning programs and strategies to support students in developing resilience, respect and care for each other including:

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS™)
PATHS™ is a comprehensive year-by-year curriculum that can be implemented from Kindergarten to Year 7 for enhancing social and emotional competencies and understanding in children including self-control, emotional awareness and interpersonal problem-solving skills. The skills that prevent and reduce bullying include the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully, handle emotions positively, empathise and make responsible decisions in a caring, pro-social classroom context.

Aussie Optimism
Aussie Optimism is developmentally appropriate for students of different ages, and has been extensively evaluated since being developed in 1997. It also has a parent component. Research indicates that Aussie Optimism can help with anti-bullying by focusing on increasing pro-social behaviour.

Aussie Optimism's Social Life Skills teaches children how to regulate their feelings, communicate effectively and solve interpersonal problems. Activities develop students' confidence to use skills in a variety of contexts, including resisting peer pressure.

Friendly Schools Plus
The Friendly Schools Plus program provides a comprehensive, evidence-based framework and curriculum to reduce bullying behaviour in primary and secondary schools. It is based on extensive research with Australian children and adolescents developed in Western Australia.

The Friendly Schools Plus program provides learning activities about how to reduce and prevent bullying, with a strong emphasis on resilience, positive communication, self-management and social responsibility. It includes individual, group, family and school community level actions to address and prevent bullying in its social context. The program specifically teaches social skill development skills within the Western Australian curriculum personal and social capabilities in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management.

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Positive Parenting Program (Triple P)

Triple P aims to equip parents with the skills and confidence they need to be self-sufficient and to be able to manage family issues without ongoing support. Parenting strategies also focus on developing positive relationships, attitudes and conduct, which are essential skills for promoting anti bullying behaviour. Studies on the impact of Triple P on bullying have shown when appropriate parenting strategies are taught and used in addition to school-based strategies, parents can actively help their children reduce both the incidence and impact of bullying.

Principals, in collaboration with their school communities, decide on the resources and programs that best meet the needs of their students.

Addressing cyberbullying in the school context

Public schools strive to create a culture in which every student experiences a sense of belonging to the school community, of being known and understood as an individual, and where staff care about each student's overall progress and wellbeing.

A 2015 report by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Creating Child-Safe Organisations, found that some young people did not feel safe at school, related largely to bullying from other students. Research conducted by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner revealed that 8 percent of young Australians aged 8 to 13 years, and 19% of young Australians aged 14 to 17 years were cyberbullied over a 12 month period.

The Department undertakes a range of activities and has numerous policies that relate to the care and safety of students in the school environment, including in relation to the use of electronic devices in cyberbullying.

The Department's *Student Behaviour* policy and procedures require schools to document a whole-school plan to support positive student behaviour and provide individual student behaviour support where the need is identified. The plan includes rules regarding personal use of mobile and other electronic devices.

The Department's *Students Online* policy states that online services provided to students in public schools will only be used for learning related activities and requires informed parental consent and appropriate management. Schools are required to provide appropriate supervision for students using the internet and other online services at school. The *Students Online* guidelines require parents and students to sign an acceptable usage agreement for online services.

The Department supports the use of personal mobile electronic devices for school work. Mobile Electronic Devices (MEDs) include a range of devices including, but not limited to smartphones, tablets and laptops. Many schools have a *Bring Your Own Device* policy or similar that supports bringing personal MEDs to school. Students will tend to use such devices at school for personal use as well as school use.

The principal will include any school rules about personal use of MEDs in the school's documented whole-school behaviour support plan. A breach of school rules relating to personal use of MEDs may be dealt with as a breach of school discipline.

Where bullying does occur, school staff are expected to ensure students are appropriately supported.

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All public schools have access to school psychologists, who can provide advice and ensure appropriate psychological services are provided to students affected by any type of bullying. Students are encouraged to tell their teacher or a trusted adult about any inappropriate behaviour. Students and their families are also encouraged to report inappropriate behaviour via the social media provider or through the eSafety Commissioner complaints system.

The Department will continue to work with the eSafety Commissioner and the Safe and Supporting School Communities Working Group to strengthen schools responses to cyberbullying.

The Department is committed to being a child safe and friendly organisation and is keen to continue and seek best practice in this regard.