Premier of Western Australia

Our Ref: 24-34006
Enquiries: Jerome Partridge

Senator Dana Wortley
Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Wortley

Inquiry into Cyber-Safety

Thank you for your letter dated 14 May 2010 regarding the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety's *Inquiry into Cyber-Safety.*

The Western Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Terms of Reference that form the foundation of this inquiry. I note that the Western Australia Police have previously provided a submission addressing cyber-safety from a policing perspective.

The Western Australian Government is of the view that it is critical we support our children and young people to access new technologies, while ensuring support is available to maintain their safety, should the need arise. Essentially a holistic approach is required.

Within this context, please find attached a submission from the Western Australian Government, addressing cyber-safety from an education perspective.

Yours sincerely

Colin Barnett MLA
PREMIER

2 0 JUL 2010

Enc.

197 St Georges Terrace, Perth, Western Australia 6000
Telephone: +61 8 9222 9888   Facsimile: +61 8 9322 1213   Email: WA-Government@dpc.wa.gov.au
www.premier.wa.gov.au

INQUIRY INTO CYBER SAFETY – SUBMISSION FROM THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

BACKGROUND

Internet and mobile technology is advancing at a fast pace, providing children and young people with opportunities that in the past would never have been possible. International trends indicate that children are accessing new technology at increasingly younger ages and with considerable ease. Although this means there is a need for strategies to keep our children and youth safe when interacting with this technology, it is important not to lose sight of the significant educational and social benefits of this technology. An understanding of how to harness these benefits is essential so that our youth and future leaders are well informed and well prepared to be active and successful citizens of the technological future.

Cyber issues are increasingly affecting children and young people internationally. It is essential that any national response to the issue of cyber safety is well researched and trialled and includes a role for parents, schools and the community. While schools can be responsible for students during school hours, parents must also monitor and respond to the use of technology after hours. Keeping young people safe online requires school communities working with the wider community to promote the knowledge and skills that children and young people require to keep themselves safe when using the Internet and mobile technology.

Cyber bullying has developed into one of the most serious issues faced by children today. Research conducted by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre at Edith Cowan University indicates that increasing numbers of children have experienced some form of cyber bullying. Students have ready access to the use of information and communication technologies including email, text messages, instant messaging and websites. All of these forms of technology may be used to engage in the bullying of other students.

The nature of cyber bullying means that the length of time students can be exposed to bullying behaviours has increased and the research suggests that some students no longer feel safe in their home environment. An added complexity is that it is now possible for students to be anonymous in their bullying. This anonymity means that a student who is being bullied is unable to identify the person engaging in the bullying and it is this which the research indicates students find most confronting

Evidence indicates that some students who would not engage in bullying behaviour face-to-face will participate in cyber bullying because of the anonymity. For any strategy to successfully address cyber bullying, the social dynamics that underpin this behaviour must be considered.

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Western Australian Department of Education has implemented a tiered approach to filtering Internet access in order to minimise the risk of student and staff exposure to inappropriate Internet content. The Department of Education has implemented a central filtering service based on blocking access to approximately 750,000 sites that have been identified as containing content that is unsuitable for the education market. This centrally managed blacklist service is linked to other similar services around the globe and is updated daily to reflect changes occurring on the Internet.

At a local network level, each school has an Internet filtering device which enables a further level of Internet access filtering to be put in place. Schools manage this level of filtering locally in order to best meet local needs.

Computers used on school networks are supplied with Internet browser software default settings that are pre-configured to block certain actions that may inadvertently lead to displaying materials containing sexual content. Similarly, most online search engine services, such as Google, Yahoo and Bing have a default `safe search' setting which can filter out most adult materials including video and image search results. In most cases, local browser and search engine preferences can be modified locally to apply varying degrees of protection from adult content.

A *Students Online* policy has been introduced for public schools to assist teachers to establish school-based procedures that both protect and inform students and their parents in the use of Departmental online services. All schools have a local policy which all students are required to sign encouraging good practice and appropriate online behaviour. The Department is working closely with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) and promotes their *Cybersmart* initiatives.

The scale and nature of the Internet is such that no filtering mechanism can offer protection from all content that may be considered inappropriate in a school setting. However when used in conjunction with user awareness, agreed operating procedures and adequate supervisory techniques in the classroom, the combination of these technologies and practices provide a high level of protection.

CHILD HEALTH PROMOTION RESEARCH CENTRE

The Western Australian Government supports a proactive prevention and protection approach to cyber safety education. The restriction of access to technology is neither a prevention of, nor a solution for cyber bullying.

Western Australia is fortunate to have the expertise and support of Professor Donna Cross amongst its local academics. Professor Cross has been instrumental in conducting research into the reasons for and effects of bullying through the Child Health Promotion Research Centre at Edith Cowan University. The reports produced by this research are highly regarded and have provided the impetus for the development of prevention and management programs endorsed by the international education community.

Recently, Professor Cross conducted extensive research into the nature and effects of cyber bullying. This research was well supported in Western Australia with both public and private schools facilitating the study of student populations. The findings and recommendations of this research have had international support and have formed the foundation for the development of strategies addressing cyber bullying by a range of government departments.

The Western Australian Government supported the Child Health Promotion Research Centre to develop *The Cyber Bullying Formative Study (2007 - 2008)* to address the rise in cyber bullying. This was one of the first pieces of research to examine student, parents and school staff understandings and needs in relation to cyber bullying behaviour. This formative study highlighted that few children who are cyber bullied will discuss the issue with parents or teachers for fear of having their mobile phones or computer taken away from them and because they believe that adults are unaware of the problem and do not know how to prevent it.

The Western Australian Government also provided $400,000 to support the first ever Youth Summit conducted by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre under the *Cyber Friendly Schools Project (2007 - 2009)*. Two summits were held to identify effective and appropriate prevention and management strategies for adolescents that involve coordinated responses between school and families.

The first summit enabled 200 Year 10 students to be engaged in problem solving around the issue of cyber bullying. The second was held for staff and parents. The results of the summit were presented to the Western Australian Minister for Education in the form of a Declaration. The ideas outlined in this document demonstrated the willingness of young people to own the problem and to develop their own solutions. This research confirmed that student -focused problem solving is the most powerful strategy to combat cyber bullying. Solutions owned by our young people are the way forward and the key to making a difference.

CYBER SAFETY FOR CHILDREN WORKING PARTY

Recent evidence strongly suggests that a community approach is best to address cyber bullying with early and appropriate interventions. This has prompted the establishment of a cross sectoral and inter agency working party to address the many facets of cyber safety – the Cyber Safety for Children Working Party. This group is the first of its kind in Australia and establishes a cross sectoral link between key stakeholders and supports schools to address internet safety issues.

The Cyber Safety for Children Working Party, initiated and chaired by the Department of Education, includes representation from the: Department for Child Protection; Department for Communities; WA Police ; the Office of Crime Prevention; Principals Associations; Catholic and Independent schools; Western Australian Community of State School Organisations; and Edith Cowan University.

The Cyber Safety for Children Working Party provides a forum for the discussion and application of the findings of this inquiry, particularly in relation to the nature, prevalence, implications of, and level of risk associated with cyber safety threats, as well as the effectiveness of both Australian and international responses to cyber

safety threats. The Working Party would be an effective tool for supporting the cultural change required in schools to reduce the effects of cyber bullying.

CYBERSMART TRAINING PROGRAM AND OUTREACH TRAINING

The Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and the Australian Independent Schools Western Australia have established a close relationship with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). This relationship ensures that all primary schools, public and private, are able to access the *Cybersmart Detectives* online activity developed and presented by ACMA.

ACMA's *Outreach Training* program is in high demand and valued by Western Australian schools. However, one presenter to support South Australia and Western Australia is completely inadequate when the geography of Western Australia is taken into consideration.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION K-10 SYLLABUS

The Department of Education has developed syllabuses for early childhood (Kindergarten to Year 3), middle childhood (Years 4 to 7) and early adolescence (Years 8 to 10). The K-10 Syllabus embeds the national Statement of Learning for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which includes building an understanding of both the legal, ethical and health and safety implications of using ICT and the responsibilities as users and developers. This may provide an appropriate forum for the dissemination of findings from this inquiry which need to be targeted directly at students.

EVIDENCE-BASED BULLYING INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

The following evidence-based bullying intervention programs developed by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre for primary and secondary schools have been piloted in Western Australian schools:

- *Childhood Aggression Prevention* program (CAP), which is a classroom based program for Early Childhood students. Students are taught to understand and manage both their emotions and social interactions.

- *Friendly Schools and Families* program which is being used in over 1,500 schools in Australia and Singapore. The program builds the capacity of schools to engage the whole school community, especially parents, to address bullying behaviour. Following the intervention program the number of students willing to report when they were bullied increased; and

- *Supportive Schools* program, designed for secondary schools and trialled extensively with positive outcomes. The program involves the implementation of whole school strategies to reduce the levels of frequent bullying and build students' ability to develop functional relationships.

The strength of these programs is that they have been developed in and for Australian children and young people. They are compatible with existing Australian curriculum, programs and practice. These programs represent best practice and should be considered for wider implementation in Australian schools.

In 2009, the Child Health Promotion Research Centre conducted a comprehensive literature review, *Cyber Safety Literature Review (2009)*, commissioned by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. This review provides the most recent and comprehensive review of cyber safety issues, including best practice safeguards , conducted to date in Australia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Western Australian Government recommends that the Joint Select Committee:

- bases all conclusions on research and evidence; and

- promotes a coordinated and collective effort between the community and government.