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Report to

**Joint Select Committee
on Cyber-Safety**

Submission on the Australian Parliament's Joint Select Committee Inquiry on Cyber-Safety

Association of Independent Schools of SA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission to the Australian Parliament's Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety is presented by the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA). The AISSA represents the interests of 96 member schools across South Australia (100% membership). The AISSA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to informing practices in this important area of cyber safety

The AISSA is the peak advocacy and advisory body for Independent schools in SA. In preparing this submission, the AISSA consulted with a group of member schools to ascertain the extent of the cyber-safety issues facing schools, what they are doing to minimise the prevalence and seriousness of issues and how effective these actions are. The Association has also drawn on the expertise of the AISSA's staff in writing this submission. These staff provide advice to member schools and implement professional development for school staff.

The Association's consultation with member schools indicated that the online mediums used by young people are diverse and that there are a wide range of issues facing school communities in regards to cyber safety. However, it is not the technology itself that poses problems for schools and students but the ways it can be used as well as the speed at which bullying or harassment can be spread. Some concerns raised by member schools about when technology is not adding value included:

- students using 'bluetooth' technology to share answers and information during lessons;
- protocols around teacher and student relationships on Facebook;
- cyber bullying;
- students using phones with Facebook during detention;
- students using websites such as 'Rate My Teacher' and Facebook to defame and slander teachers. One teacher mentioned feeling fearful about disciplining students in case of public and slanderous retribution. Another example was given of a student that was expelled from a school, which was immediately followed by a Facebook page being set up asking members to support the student to be placed back in the school.

All school community members, including teachers, students and parents,should be empowered with the knowledge of the risks technology may pose and be equipped with useful techniques and tools to manage incidents as soon as they arise. There was a common opinion amongst member schools that education regarding cyber-bullying often omits the importance of ethical behaviour in all social relationships.

When schools implement a values-based social curriculum throughout their teaching and learning methodologies, this builds capacity in students to remain safe in every context, not just online. The Independent schools that took part in this consultation have developed a focus on teaching the core skills, values, attitudes and behaviours that young people can enact in every situation, as opposed to trying to understand every facet of each website, tool or program.

Cyber-safety is a partnership between schools and families. Schools are making concerted and innovative efforts towards minimising cyber-safety concerns in

their school communities, taking their responsibility for keeping children safe, even outside school hours, very seriously. In addition, the Police are engaged when serious incidents compromising student safety occur. However, this does not diminish the responsibility of the wider community and governments in enhancing online safety.

Since 2005, the three schooling sectors in South Australia have worked very closely together on a *Coalition to Decrease Bullying, Harassment and Violence in South Australian Schools*. This sharing of expertise acknowledges that bullying is not confined to specific schools, sectors or even limited to within the school gate.

Whilst the safety of students in Independent schools is paramount, member schools expressed concern that establishing an Online Ombudsman may not be the most effective way to ensure students remain safe from cyber-harm.

The application of an administrative/regulatory approach to cyber-safety is not considered the most appropriate risk management strategy.

Independent schools continue are committed to ensure children remain safe from cyber-harm, although it is a rapidly expanding area. There is a view that it is difficult to remain ahead of the issue in terms of emerging technology, expertise and practices. Cyber-safety needs to be incorporated into a comprehensive set of strategies associated with the safety and welfare of children. A number of recommendations are made to the Committee for consideration.

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

The AISSA's submission will respond specifically to the following Terms of Reference:

i) The online environment in which Australian children currently engage;
ii) Abuse of children online, particularly cyber bullying;
iii) Inappropriate social and health behaviours in an online environment;
iv) Ways to support schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber bullying;
v) The merit of establishing an Online Ombudsman to investigate, advocate and act on cyber-safety issues.

The Association responds to these Terms of Reference as they apply to the South Australian Independent schools sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The AISSA puts forward the following ideas to the Committee for consideration:

➢ A wider range of programs promoting cyber-safety and the risks of the online environment could be developed and distributed without cost to schools and students. Existing programs should be more readily available. For example, the Australian Communication and Media Authority's *Cybersafety Outreach: Professional Development for Educators* are considered by member schools that provided feedback to be excellent workshops, however can be difficult to access for staff, especially in smaller, regional schools because they are face-to-face and take considerable time to complete.
➢ A readily available, simple and easy to understand explanation of the changing online environment for parents and schools to access.
➢ Continual review, and updates, of materials to ensure their relevance to school communities and the wider community.
➢ Users of information and communication technology should be encouraged to approach it using the same values, attitudes and thought processes as they would with any other social interaction or behaviour.
➢ A promotional campaign put in place to inform school communities what constitutes an e-crime. Many students may not be aware that what they are doing is not only bullying, but it may also be against the law.
➢ A positive, educational approach to support schools in cyber-safety is favoured by member schools as opposed to a regulatory/administrative, deficit approach.

- Pre-service and in-service teachers be given additional support and training on online safety, responsible use of technology and online security and privacy. Many teachers would benefit from greater support and advice to recognise and manage incidents of cyber harm.
- Recognition that while schools play a vital role, using information and communication technology safely is a whole-of-society concern and responsibility. It is not the responsibility of schools to teach students in isolation, because technology is most often used at home and in wider society. There needs to be a collegial approach between schools, parents and community members to learn and employ ethics and values in using technology safely.
- A greater suite of resources that can be used within the curriculum to teach students about the social and emotional consequences of cyber-bullying and inappropriate behaviours that are regularly reviewed.
- Exploration of the formation of a national an advisory group to guide policy development and keeping a watching brief on the 'bigger picture', particularly in regards to international research and policies. This is an alternative to the establishment of an Online Ombudsman that the AISSA may support.
- Currently in South Australia, mandatory reporting requirements exist for teachers and others in relation to suspected physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect. This could be extended to include online maltreatment or abuse, though this would require extensive consultation and negotiation with states. Any variation to the mandatory reporting laws would need to be supported by adequate funded training of teachers to recognise and report incidents of cyber-harm.

INTRODUCTION

1.1.   Profile of the sector

1.1.1.   Overview

The AISSA represents the interests of 96 South Australian Independent (Non-Catholic) schools with an enrolment in excess of 43,400. The AISSA has a formal Committee structure that incorporates the key school authorities and interest groups within the Independent school sector.

South Australian Independent schools educate students within a curriculum underpinned by a diverse range of religious affiliations (Anglican, Baptist, Christian, Christadelphian, Greek Orthodox, Islamic, Jewish, Lutheran, Seventh Day Adventist, Uniting) and educational philosophies (Montessori, Waldorf Steiner). The sector also includes a number of secular schools and a special school which educates students with severe intellectual disabilities and many schools also cater for boarding students. A number of Independent schools are also members of a system, for example, the Lutheran Schools Association and Adventist Schools Australia.

Enrolments within Independent schools have significantly increased since 1994. This growth has been most prominent in schools located in the outer suburbs and regional centres across South Australia. Throughout this period the sector has also witnessed increased enrolments of students with special needs including students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties.

Independent schools are required to be registered via the Non-Government Schools Registration Board (NGSRB). The criteria for registration include appropriate policy and procedures relating to the safety and welfare of children.

1.1.2.   Governance model

Independent schools are distinguished by a model of governance based on local management through school boards and accountability to school communities. Autonomy from a centralised model of administration is an essential principle underpinning non-systemic Independent schools. Some schools are members of a school system (e.g. Lutheran and Seventh Day Adventist) and hence, have collective accountability to that recognised school authority.

Independent schools are accountable to government through the requirements for school registration under the *Education Act 1972* and on a number of other legislative levels, for example, the *Children's Services Act 1985*, *Children's Protection Act 1993*, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together-Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004*. As part of school registration requirements, schools are required to have a range of policies in place including bullying and harassment and child protection.

The direct accountability of Independent schools to parents is a key strength of the Independent school sector.

1.0 AISSA FEEDBACK ON THE INQUIRY'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.1. Introduction

Underpinning this submission is the AISSA's core belief that children have the right to learn in safe and supportive learning environments.

The AISSA response is based on feedback from member schools that participated in the consultation process. It is important to note that while all schools are concerned about keeping students cyber-safe, each Independent school has autonomy in relation to individual policies. As such, the AISSA is presenting a collective view based on advice from a sample of member schools and is not representing the views of individual member schools.

1.2. The online environment in which Australian children currently engage

1.2.1. Consultation

The AISSA's consultation indicates that among school-aged children, the online environment in which they participate is extremely varied. The consensus was that most students may be engaged in using technology in some form. The current online environment includes, but is not limited to, mobile phones, chat rooms (including Chatroulette), various search engines, Instant Messaging (e.g. MSN), blogs, online games, websites such as 'Rate My Teacher' and 'formspring.me', You Tube and social networking sites such as Facebook, moshimonsters, MySpace and Bebo.

The technologies which were predominantly referred to in the discussion as impacting on the school environment were mobile phones and computers. However, it was recognised that with the merging capabilities, the technologies were not the most relevant aspect of focus, but rather the interactions and forums in which these technologies are being used by school-aged children.

Information and communication technology is a significant element of today's society and many young people struggle to see the world without it. For instance, one teacher quoted a student asking, "*What did we do before Google?*" and no other student could think of such a time. This response typifies the reliance many young people now have on technology and its capabilities. The decreasing costs of technology, ensures that more students have access to different forms. This can be very beneficial for education, as school staff were very quick to to identify the many benefits technology offers students in terms of engagement, interaction and fast access to information.

Member schools do not support banning the various forms of technology now accessible to young people because they are aware the school environment is the safest place for children to learn about the features and risks. It can also be a valuable teaching and learning tool in which students readily engage. The benefits of technology cannot be overlooked. However, certain online games and

social networking sites are banned on school computers to protect students while at school.

From the consultation process, it emerged that Year five is the most common entry point into the online social networking environment. This is consistent with available literature in the area, however it is also worth noting that many students use technology earlier or later than this. It was reported that generally, by Year eight, the majority of students have mobile phones and many schools allow restricted use during school hours. In fact, it was reported that many students own more than one mobile phone.

The consultation indicated little difference in the engagement of boys and girls in the online environment, however there was a view that girls use the online environment predominantly for social networking, whereas boys mainly use it for to play games.

The diversity of the online environment is rich as is the way that students use it. Consequently, it is important for school schools staff and the wider community to remain up-to-date with the emergence of different technologies available and both the benefits and harm they may cause. This approach will assist schools to identify the opportunities and risks to students. It will also assist in reporting incidents and offering appropriate supports.

Schools need to continually review policies required by the NGSRB, including child protection, behaviour management and student grievance policies, to ensure new forms of information and communication technologies, such as I-Phones and I-Pads, are incorporated.

The focus for schools is teaching about cyber-safety rather than about specific technologies, especially given the speed at which information and communication technology is changing.

1.2.2. Recommendations

In consideration of the above, the AISSA recommends the Committee consider the following ideas as part of this Inquiry:

➢ A wider range of programs promoting cyber-safety and the risks of the online environment be developed and distributed without cost to schools and students. Existing programs should be more readily available. For example, the Australian Communication and Media Authority's (ACMA) *Cybersafety Outreach: Professional Development for Educators* are considered by member schools that provided feedback to be excellent workshops, however can be difficult to access for staff, especially in smaller, regional schools because they are face-to-face and take considerable time to complete.

➢ A readily available, simple and easy to understand explanation of the changing online environment for parents and schools to access.

➢ Continual review, and updates, of materials to ensure their relevance to school communities and the wider community.

1.3. Abuse of children online, particularly cyber bullying

1.3.1. Consultation

The school representatives consulted predominantly focused on the positive aspects of information and communication technology, and the effective ways to educate students about online safety. There was an awareness of the risks of abuse of children online. The protection of students online is seen as one element the school's responsibility to keep students safe.

There was an overarching view that users of the technology should be taught to approach it using the same values, thought processes and attitudes as they would with other forms of social interaction. This principle also applies to parents, who should be encouraged to use the same criteria in judging whether their children are at risk online, just as they would assess other risks such as determining when they are ready to travel the city centre alone.

Independent schools pride themselves on having strong values that are incorporated across the formal curriculum and approaches to pastoral care. Many parents choose Independent schools having trust in the values that are propagated within the school community. This is a sound starting point to work with families on cyber safety.

Positive relationships between teachers and students are imperative to effective learning. This also ensures that students feel safe to report whatever inappropriate material or behaviours they encounter online, which is consistent with the approaches identified in the *National Safe Schools Framework* (NSSF). The NSSF promotes an agreed national approach to help schools and their communities operate in a safe environment. The Framework enables consistent messages to be communicated to school communities on how to respond to incidents compromising student safety. The Federal and State governments collaborated with non-government school authorities in developing this Framework. Since its first implementation in schools, new technologies have emerged and resulted in incidents such as cyber-bullying. Hence, the NSSF is under review to ensure it reflects the current information and communication technologies available, information regarding cyber-bullying as well as Federal and State legislation regarding online crime. Following the completion of the review, the Framework and supporting documentation will be accessible online for use by schools.

Cyber-bullying can be considered as another form of bullying using a new medium. However it is the speed at which incidents and opinions can be shared, such as via mobile phones and You Tube, and the significant numbers of people that can receive the online information (and photos) that causes significant concern.

Many young people now increasingly communicate online rather than face-to-face. A challenge schools have faced is convincing students that not all the people in chat rooms and social networking sites actually use their true identity and this can present potential dangers. Sites such as Chatroulette cause concern for schools because of the unknown dangers that strangers may pose. However, school staff consider that most online relationships are positive and real and girls,

in particular, usually chat to those people they know. For some adolescents that are having difficulties with face-to-face relationships, online relationships can benefit their self-esteem and be a positive aspect of their life. This reinforces the need for social and emotional competencies to be explicitly taught as students need to be are aware of the dangers and be cautioned about entering 'rooms' that are insecure.

The inclusion of these generic skills in the new Australian Curriculum as general Capabilities offers an opportunity to incorporate cyber safety education across Australian schools.

Information and communication technology is seen as something to be embraced. However it is vital that staff, students and parents are informed about online safety and how to remain safe online. All school representatives were united in the view that policies regarding student technology use should not be overly restrictive because the technologies and their various capabilities exist in other dimensions of students' lives, as well as learning.

School communities need to be made aware of the capabilities of the technology. Schools have a key role in educating young people to assess risks and protect themselves from harm. For instance, some schools use Facebook during lessons with middle school students (Years 6-10) to explicitly teach young people how to set their privacy settings to ensure they remain as safe as possible. When technology is used in a school environment to demonstrate potential dangers, it is important to provide context. There are various media, such as *Tracking Teresa,* which can be used to demonstrate potential dangers to students and how to avoid them. It is also important that teachers also provide a balanced explanation regarding the likelihood of online abuse so as not to generate unnecessary paranoia or fear in students.

Overall, the AISSA's consultation indicated that school representatives held a balanced view of the cyber world, considering both the benefits and risks that may be present and teaching appropriate safeguards to protect students.

1.3.2. Recommendations

In consideration of the above, AISSA recommends the Committee consider the following idea as part of the Inquiry:
  ➢ Users of information and communication technology should be encouraged to approach it using the same values, attitudes and thought processes as they would with any other social interaction or behaviour.

1.4. Inappropriate social and health behaviours in an online environment

1.4.1. Consultation

Feedback provided from member schools indicates it is not the actual technology that poses problems, as technology can in fact offer many benefits. Rather, it is the inappropriate use of technology or lack of understanding that can potentially lead to a range of unsafe behaviours and situations. There was consensus amongst participants of the AISSA consultation that the following principle should

guide whether behaviour in an online environment is inappropriate: "*If you wouldn't do it in person, don't do it online*".

There is often quite a narrow view of inappropriate online behaviours perpetuated and many people only refer to cyber-bullying. A broader perspective was evident in the consultation with schools, with the focus being on online relationships and the beliefs and attitudes that young people have about their interactions in the cyber world. Members discussed two broad spheres of 'dangers' that students need to be aware:

'stranger danger'....
- *Safe and secure online practices*
- *Students should think of their online world as secure, not private*
- *Online abuse*
- *Is that person who they say they are?*

'social dangers' ....
- *The concept of 'I am what I post' – and what does that look like today, next year and in 20 years time, (am I being a 'danger to myself'?)*
- *I am what others post – who has the rights to me?*
- *Unintentional or intentional negative social interactions, the absence of well articulated and agreed upon social conventions and values associated with the use of technologies. This is where cyber-bullying starts.*
- *Understanding spheres of relational intimacy – who do I want to know what about me and what should I share about others?*

It is apparent that many students are not fully cognisant about the permanent nature of postings on the Internet. It appears they lack the foresight to realise that once a photo, phone number or rumour is posted onto the Internet, it is out of their control. An example used in schools to teach children about this is asking them if they would like that photo enlarged and shown at school assembly.

Some concerns raised by member schools about when technology is not adding value included:
- students using 'bluetooth' technology to share answers and information during lessons;
- protocols around teacher and student relationships on Facebook;
- cyber-bullying;
- students using phones with Facebook during detention;
- students using websites such as 'Rate My Teacher' and Facebook to defame and slander teachers. One teacher mentioned feeling fearful about disciplining students in case of public and slanderous retribution. Another example was given of a student that was expelled from a school, which was immediately followed by a Facebook page being set up asking members to support the student to be placed back in the school.

Independent schools engage with the Police when serious incidents occur. In addition, there are circumstances that also require mandatory reporting to protect young people. However, while schools are aware of the criminal dangers

and issues that can take place in an online environment, their core focus is teaching students to understand their interactions and the related social dimensions.

Many teachers and parents may not be aware that as well as being morally wrong, cyber-bullying and other inappropriate behaviours may also be against the law. An e-crime is where technology, for example a mobile phone, is used to commit an offence such as harassment. E-crimes can be reported to police and offenders can be prosecuted. This is not widely known throughout the community.

While there are certainly inappropriate behaviours in an online environment, it is important not to create unnecessary fear and anxiety in students and parents. People can be suspicious and resistant to using information and communication technology because of a lack of understanding or concern about the overwhelming focus on the dangers. The inappropriate behaviours represent a reasonably small proportion of issues related to technology. Resources, such as *Friendly Schools and Families* (Edith Cowan University), *Kidsmatter*, *Mindmatters*, *Program Achieve, Bounce Back, ThinkUKnow* and many others, can assist in building capacity in students to cope with incidents of bullying, regardless of the delivery medium.

1.4.2. Recommendations

In consideration of the above, the AISSA recommends the Committee to consider the following idea as part of this Inquiry:
  ➢ A promotional campaign put in place to inform school communities what constitutes an e-crime. Many students may not be aware that what they are doing is not only bullying, but it may also be against the law.

1.5. Ways to support schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber bullying

1.5.1. Consultation

Any new strategies to support schools to enhance their existing culture to reduce cyber-bullying must acknowledge the good work already taking place in schools. The wording of this part of the Terms of Reference starts from a deficit perspective. Consultation indicated positive attitudes by teachers towards the use of information and communication technology. Independent schools have developed and implemented innovative and effective strategies that attempt to minimise the incidence and impact of cyber-bullying. The AISSA also provides advice and professional development to member schools regarding the establishment of protocols for appropriate online behaviour by staff and students.

School ethos and culture are important factors that contribute to the incidence and impact cyber bullying can have on school communities. Similarly, all school community members must be empowered with knowledge of the risks information and communication technology may pose and useful techniques and tools to manage incidents as soon as they arise.

There was a common view amongst member schools that education regarding cyber-bullying often omits the fundamental negative values underlying the bullying behaviour. The social values and behaviours that make bullying a societal ill are the same- whether the medium be name-calling, violence or cyber harm. We acknowledge that school leaders and the wider school community have a responsibility to develop and maintain a positive school culture that respects each individual and establishes a safe environment. Building resilience in each student should be an integral element of this strategy.

Independent schools currently use a wide range of programs to reduce the incidence and impact of cyber-bullying in schools. For instance the explicit teaching of the *"Stop. Think. Do"* decision making process is used by a number of teachers to ensure students think through their behaviour before acting. Many Independent schools in SA use resources developed by the ACMA. All Independent schools have incorporated the principles and strategies of the NSSF into their policies and procedures regarding student behaviour. In addition, all Independent schools are required to comply with the NGSRB criteria relating to behaviour management and child protection policies. Many Independent schools have attended, and hosted, presentations by highly regarded consultants in this area including Jody Melbourne from CQR Consulting, Susan McLean, Michael Carr-Gregg and ACMA.

Since the increasing prevalence of online activity by students, and attention on cyber harm, Independent school authorities have amended their policies to ensure cyber-bullying is covered and protocols are in place for dealing with incidents. Most incidents of cyber bullying in AISSA member schools are dealt with in a firm, supportive and considered manner. However the policies and strategies employed differ between schools; they are usually developed in consultation with school leaders and teachers, school Boards and student representatives. Policies by individual member schools are developed for students and teachers and are reviewed as required.

The *Restorative Justice* approach is used by some AISSA member schools when dealing with incidents of cyber bullying. It focuses on developing an understanding in students of the social and emotional impact of their behaviour, for oneself and others, rather than an emphasis on tangible consequences. The focus is on restoring an appropriate relationship.

Since 2005 the three school sectors in South Australia have worked together via the *Coalition to Decrease Bullying, Harassment and Violence in South Australian Schools*. The three sectors in SA are represented on this committee, as well as universities and internationally renowned experts in the area of bullying and student behaviour. This sharing of expertise acknowledges that bullying is not confined to specific schools, sectors or even within the school gate. The committee collaborates on specific issues, including cyber-bullying, and researches and develops unified strategies and approaches all schools can benefit from. Professional learning opportunities are also offered to school staff.

The AISSA's consultation indicated that most teachers feel equipped to manage the school-based problems that arise, such as cyber bullying occurring at school. However, this becomes a burden upon schools when they are expected to act in isolation and bear full responsibility for teaching children how to use technology

safely. It needs to be recognised as a joint responsibility *with* parents and that schools may not necessarily need to be involved if the only link between the parties is that they attend school together. There were divided opinions about whether schools need to be involved in resolving incidents that occur outside of school hours. Each school states their position in their behaviour policy and as all schools are concerned about the wellbeing of students, they offer support and strategies to parents to manage their child's online behaviour. It was acknowledged that parents and schools need to work together with students. It is a whole of society problem and there is no limit to when and where this can occur.

The responsibility of managing student behaviour online outside of school hours is a particular concern for schools that have student boarding facilities. Even if computers are placed in a supervised area, many students have mobile phones/I-pads with Internet capabilities that can be used at any time. Boarding supervisors have implemented specific policies to keep students cyber-safe but generally allow social networking sites to be used, understanding the interest of adolescents. One example of a policy implemented is allocating specific times when boarding students can go onto sites such as Facebook. Policies such as these are enacted in consultation with parents, and member schools report that parents tend to be supportive of any measures introduced.

1.5.2. Recommendations

In consideration of the above, AISSA recommends the Committee to consider the following strategies as part of this Inquiry:
  ➤ A positive, educational approach to support schools in cyber-safety is favoured by member schools as opposed to a regulatory/administrative, deficit approach.
  ➤ Pre-service and in-service teachers be given additional support and training on online safety, responsible use of technology and online security and privacy. Many teachers would benefit from greater support and advice to recognise and manage incidents of cyber harm.
  ➤ Recognition that while schools play a vital role, using information and communication technology safely is a whole-of-society concern and responsibility. It is not the responsibility of schools to teach students in isolation, because technology is most often used at home and in wider society. There needs to be a collegial approach between schools, parents and community members to learn and employ ethics and values in using technology safely.
  ➤ A greater suite of resources that can be used within the curriculum to teach students about the social and emotional consequences of cyber-bullying and inappropriate behaviours that are regularly reviewed.

1.6. The merit of establishing an Online Ombudsman to investigate, advocate and act on cyber-safety issues

1.6.1. Consultation

There is reservation about the establishment of an Online Ombudsman. There is a number of mechanisms already in place by which to investigate and report to regarding cyber-safety issues. The requirements of school registration set out by

the NGSRB ensure that child protection and anti-bullying and harassment policies are in place in all schools to protect students from harm, including cyber-harm. The Association does not support duplication of policies and processes. Enhanced red tape will not enhance the effectiveness of strategies to ensure cyber-safety.

When serious incidents that compromise student safety occur, the Police are contacted and take carriage of incidents. There is also legislation in place to support victims of cyber harm, such as harassment and defamation laws.

At a local level, schools have developed policies to follow when managing incidents of cyber-bullying and abuse. In incidents involving students, there is usually a broader context that needs to be considered with schools often being in the best position to consider this. Schools can implement a supportive set of strategies, with the support of Police or others if required, without the heavy-handed approach an Ombudsman may introduce.

In issues between students, it is sometimes the case that the aggrieved student and parents remain dissatisfied with the outcome, regardless of the process taken. If an external body such as an Online Ombudsman is readily available to handle complaints, parties may be less willing to resolve the matter at a local school level. Schools are concerned that parents and students may not use their best endeavours to resolve the issues at a school level and escalate matters unnecessarily.

The AISSA also expresses concern that an Online Ombudsman may not be the most efficient administrative process by which to report incidents of cyber harm. It may in fact slow down the process of reporting, investigating and acting upon issues, when cyber-safety is an area that moves rapidly and needs to be constantly monitored and managed. In addition, schools may be reluctant to involve an Ombudsman because of the perceived additional administrative duties associated with this process. Teachers may also be confused about their role in the investigation and management of incidents because of a perception that an Ombudsman will solve the problem. Consequently, incidents may go undetected, unreported and unresolved.

The Association is also concerned about the negative impact on young people resulting from being involved in a legalistic process and the associated administrative burden that would be generated.

The AISSA would not support the introduction of an Online Ombudsman as the overarching advocacy body for this area without further evidence to support that it would have a positive impact on eliminating cyber-safety issues.

1.6.2. Recommendations

In consideration of the above AISSA recommends the Committee to consider the following strategies as part of this Inquiry:
  - Exploration of the formation of a national an advisory group to guide policy development and keeping a watching brief on the 'bigger picture', particularly in regards to international research and policies. This is an alternative to the establishment of an Online Ombudsman that the AISSA may support.

> ➢ Currently in South Australia, mandatory reporting requirements exist for teachers and others in relation to suspected physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect. This could be extended to include online maltreatment or abuse, though this would require extensive consultation and negotiation with states. Any variation to the mandatory reporting laws would need to be supported by adequate funded training of teachers to recognise and report incidents of cyber-harm. This could be an alternative to introducing an Online Ombudsman.

2.0   CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Information and communication technologies can add considerable value to the learning environment for students. However, while acknowledging the many benefits technology offers, it is also crucial that schools remain alert to the risks that can be present with online interactions.

One of the core challenges facing Independent schools is how to remain up-to-date with cyber-safety resources, given the cyber world is rapidly evolving. Independent schools are continually exploring approaches to ensure students remain cyber-safe. The explicit teaching of the fundamental values and ethics that guide young people's decision making in any arena of their lives is considered the foundation of cyber-safety. These values and ethics are reflected throughout the curriculum offered in Independent schools.

Member schools reinforced the notion that the means of technology is not the central issue in keeping children cyber-safe. It is not necessary to understand every facet of specific information and communication technologies to keep children safe or minimise cyber-bullying incidents. Rather, schools and parents need to work together *with* young people to equip all users of technology with the skills and capacity to assess risk and have supports in place to enable them to report incidents.

Administrative/regulatory strategies cannot alone eliminate the negative aspects information and communication technologies may present.