Community role in school solutions

Hard on the heels of becoming de facto public health enforcers around Covid-19, and while underlining hugely important, but time-consuming, messages to students about online safety and consent, here comes another competitor for teachers' time.

When educators are asked to address behaviours that may manifest in schools but are actually created in broader society, it is vital that there is actual community involvement in delivering solutions.

If teachers and school leaders had the support of all parents, schools would be far better places for all – educators, students and staff alike.

Schools are part of the broader community. The reality is that levels of behaviour once expected as sheer good manners are not only missing when it comes to some students – those behaviours are actually reinforced by some parents.

Verbal and physical aggression keeps on rising. We are seeing more teachers driven out of the profession by harassment and violence.

Most worryingly of all, it is becoming all too common for any effort to address violent behaviour by students to attract, not backing from parents, but additional aggression.

The SSTUWA, in cooperation with the state government, has worked hard to address violence; to urge proper sanctions of students who are aggressive verbally or physically.

The then-Education Minister's 10-point plan was a solid start, so too was the state government's election pledge, secured by the SSTUWA, to increase the number of Alternative Learning Settings.

Sadly, it is hard for any measures to keep pace with a growing tide of violent behaviour – a tide rising ever higher during and since the pandemic.

Social media outlets such as TikTok see no need to remove posts encouraging anti-social activities at school – and indeed actively promote some trends which pose a threat to teachers.

Teachers are also far too often subjected to individual and even coordinated campaigns of harassment and intimidation via channels such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

Because of the care teachers have for their students they see it as important to play their role in instilling socially responsible behaviours as part of the educational process.

However, without a commitment from all school community stakeholders to support such efforts they will be compromised, in some schools even doomed to fail.

The SSTUWA will continue to work cooperatively with the state government to try to ensure our members can be safe at work.

We believe it will need not only a strong enforcement of existing measures but a public campaign to restore respect for educators and remind parents that we cannot help their children if they do not help us.

We have heard of some excellent concepts suggested during consultation meetings from the independent and ongoing review process commissioned by the SSTUWA Executive.

Ideas such as school campuses being central community facilities embracing health care options as well as on-site support from agencies such as community services could offer a better way forward, especially in regional and remote areas where problems are multiplying fast.

Of course, full resourcing for WA schools would be needed to deliver such outcomes, but the benefits for communities

would return massively on such investment.

There is also a need to remove some burdens as others are added onto the tasklist for educators.

The number of distractions from the core business of educators – actually being in a classroom and teaching or lecturing – keep on growing and it will take a coordinated community effort to reverse that trend.

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The latest area where teachers and school leaders should apparently take control over student behaviour is vaping.

Vaping is rivalling artificial intelligence as the social panic hot topic. Whenever there is a crisis, it must be teachers who take action, apparently.

Mobile phone use is making a comeback into discussion because of proposed legislation in New South Wales to ban not just the use of phones but their very presence on school grounds.

Now there is no doubt that action on vaping and phone use is supported by many, including educators, but as with so many elements of education it is vitally important to consult those expected to enforce any new rules. Read more about the vaping issue on page 20.



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