Respect needed in the online space

The SSTUWA is calling for respect for public educators in not only a face-to-face context, but also in the online world, urging legal action against abusers where needed.

As the union continues its campaign for respect for teachers, school leaders and other public education workers, feedback from its 2025 State of Our Schools survey show the amount and extraordinary type of abuse they are receiving over the internet.

Of the more-than 1,600 respondents to the survey, just over 25 per cent said incidents involving violent behaviour (harassment online through social media or email) from parents/guardians happened once a term.

About 19 per cent said these incidents happened several times a term or less.

Examples of these incidents involved angry parents emailing about the type of foods allowed for crunch and sip time; threats of physical violence against staff and emails directing profanity and derogatory language to staff.

“[Received] an email from a student, from his student email address to my teacher email, saying ‘F*** you,’” one respondent reported.

“A parent emailed, threatening that he will ‘come and sort me out’,” another respondent said.

Another respondent said: “After a news story there was a claim that female staff members were instigating incidents at the school. Various members of the public stated they were going to come onto campus and assault the staff members that were on duty if their child(ren) were ever hurt. It was aimed at female staff members.”

Parents are emailing teachers to complain that they are not responding to their emails fast enough, or disputing school information or decisions.

“Parents [are] hearing things that have supposedly been said and believing it, and then emailing abuse to ask why it happened, rather than getting [the] full story from me,” one respondent said.

Another respondent commented: “Parents [are] taking to [the] local area Facebook page to say degrading, hurtful and untrue things about staff members.”

Said another survey respondent: “Generally, the harassment is from parents who send multiple lengthy emails when the school makes a decision or enacts a process they do not like.”

“It is usually not ‘aggressive’, and more ‘assertive’, however, [it is] generally entirely unnecessary and creates a significant workload. This has been a growing issue in the last decade.

“Earlier in my career, it seemed that more parents accepted school policies, procedures and decisions.

“Now, parents waste staff time by harassing schools with lengthy emails about things as benign as exam timetables, course selection processes, preferred teachers, marks a student receives, etc.”

Even parents of pre-service teachers on school practicums were sending messages of abuse to staff, while students were using email, social media and artificial intelligence tools to harass staff.

“Students hacked into my YouTube account via a device in the classroom and change my profile name to a pejorative term,” one teacher said.

Said another: “AI-generated videos animating a picture of me to perform various actions – derogatory comments [made] on the post.”

One teacher said a TikTok account and video was created comparing them to Adolf Hitler. The social media platform did not

take down the video until three months later when it confirmed the teacher's claim that an image used was a copyright violation.

Students were also using technology to falsely blame other students of harassing staff: "Male students continuously airdropping inappropriate images to staff computer under the guise of another student."

The SSTUWA continues to call for all members of the school community to interact and speak with staff with respect and courtesy.

Members who are being harassed or abused online should report these instances to their union organiser. The SSTUWA is calling on the Department of Education to take legal action where required and to remind administrators of social media pages and groups of their legal responsibilities for what people post on pages/groups run by them.

In the meantime, the SSTUWA is encouraging people to download and display posters promoting respect in their classrooms and where people congregate in their schools.

Posters can be downloaded from sstuwa.org.au/RESPECT

Printed copies can be requested via email: contact@sstuwa.org.au

Continued emails requesting information to prove myself. Anger at not responding straight away or after hours.

TikTok account and video using my image and comparing me to Hitler. Reporting to TikTok as an issue did nothing as it 'did not go against their community standards'... I had to pursue it as a copyright issue as I owned the image. Three months later, they confirmed the copyright violation and took down the image.

"Students creating and sharing fake screenshots."

Students have created social media accounts, mostly on TikTok, targeting staff using images and video found online and on school-managed platforms.

Posting TikToks about me and recording me in class and posting on TikTok and Instagram.

I've experienced online harassment from parents who demand information, claiming they check their children's bags and haven't received physical letters I've sent home. Despite clear communication and multiple reminders, they insist that the lack of information is the teacher's fault, leading to frustration and unwarranted blame.

Multiple e-mails sent in short succession, demanding answers and meetings.

An Instagram page was created with teacher memes. I was one of the teachers.

I had a parent threaten me multiple times in several emails including menacing words, and implying physical violence.

Parents bad mouthing staff via their parent WhatsApp group who then share this with teaching staff.

Spreading false information to the parent body about toileting permission. Suggesting my expectations for parent and student behaviour is unjustified and that boundaries placed on parents is unfair.

Repeated abusive and suggestive emails from a student.

Parental posts and comments on Facebook regarding the school, class and me that are disparaging. Comments regarding the idea that I am 'just babysitting'.

Being sworn at in an online lesson.

Continual e-mailing with escalating hostile tone.

By Minh Lam

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