

The Secretary,
Government Administration Committee A,
House of Assembly,
Parliament House,
Hobart, TAS, 7000

Attn: Fiona Murphy - assemblygaa@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Fiona

I am writing this submission in response to the Resolution of the House of Assembly of 12 June 2024 to the Tasmanian Parliament in relation to the Inquiry into Discrimination and Bullying in Tasmanian Schools.

I'll begin with some credentials that I hope are helpful.

As a recently retired Principal of Launceston Christian School, a K-12 school in Riverside, I am well aware of the impact of bullying and discrimination in the school setting, both for the staff, students and families who make up a particular school community. I am also acutely aware of the factors that contribute towards a thriving community as well as the factors that undermine the capacity of staff, students and parents, indeed the whole community to thrive. Positive and respectful relationships across all sections of an organisation are a key ingredient to flourishing communities.

As a previous business owner of a small printing business in Launceston, I am well aware of the impact that a positive and respectful workplace culture has on the success of a business and the job satisfaction of those who work together with a common goal. This takes place where leadership is practiced from a servant hearted approach to the objectives of the enterprise, where clearly articulated objectives around values, shared care, concern and compassion for all, and ensuring values alignment remains at the centre of the endeavour. I believe we were able to achieve these things in building a small business over the three years where together we took the printing establishment from the brink of closure to a thriving operation which we sold as a going concern so I could follow my dream of becoming a Primary School teacher.

As a university student and subsequent teacher, both during practicums and employment in Tasmanian schools, I was well aware of the destructive nature of sub-cultures that undermine well designed authority structures in place that strive to engender positive and respectful relationships. Where these sub-cultures are permitted to infiltrate and destabilise the desired culture, the result is often a lack of observance and adherence to the shared values the community espouse as their purpose. Equally I have observed and participated in schools where the social cohesion of a school community has resulted in a culture where all participants could flourish and engage in activities and experiences that have benefits to the entire community.

It is vital that schools have policies and procedures that promote healthy and respectful relationships. In my experience, these policies have been well constructed. The points of difference lie in the implementation.

I have used the following helpful framework to think this through when creating and implementing policy. There needs to be:

1. **Common Language**
2. **Shared Understanding**
3. **Fidelity of Implementation**

Another simple framework is to craft any statement or policy by recognising that it needs to be **a consistent answer to a repeated question.**

The crucial factor lies in the commitment of the leadership of the school to 'walk the talk'. This then filters to the staff who win the trust of parents and students to work together in walking the complex pathway, where the dynamics of multiculturalism and pluralism combine as growing relationships develop through living in a community together.

From the vantage point of an educator over 30 years and a school leader for over 17 years, this trust affords a richness where issues are confidently raised and addressed, and genuine efforts are made to work towards win/win outcomes that benefit all.

It is not surprising to hear of situations where these desired win/win outcomes have not eventuated. It is a complex task to regulate human behaviour, especially when shared values are not so shared. There is not one single factor to which the blame can be attributed. If it were only that simple! But there are key ingredients that need to be present for these win/win outcomes to result.

Setting up an inquiry into discrimination and bullying is a step in the right direction. It would have been helpful for the Terms of Reference to intentionally include an investigation into the successful settings where the issues of discrimination and bullying are less prevalent. *(This maybe a subsequent outcome following the enquiry's findings)*

It is my belief, informed from experience, that success in this area begins with clear definitions of what constitutes discrimination and bullying as opposed to what is more commonly seen as differences or disagreements that need some hard work and intervention to be resolved before escalating and heading towards the destructive aspects of discrimination and bullying. Too often a problem is quickly defined, even mis-defined, as either discrimination or bullying which lead to a victim versus oppressor mentality which escalates situations that could otherwise be seen as invitations towards resolution and harmony rather than threats that need to be eliminated. Any situation where humans engage has the potential to be a celebration of diversity and unity or a conflict of differences and separation. How we enter into this engagement makes all the difference.

In the school setting, clear and agreed rules of engagement that are negotiated and committed to by the key stakeholders (leadership, staff, parents and students) is critical. I suspect that the enquiry will find that where these shared rules of engagement are in place, regardless of the setting, be it government schools in low, middle or high socioeconomic areas or independent or Catholic schools in city, rural or remote places, the levels of bullying and discrimination will be significantly diminished. I suspect the main difference will not be in the levels of reporting but in how the occurrences are followed up and restoration of relationships and resolutions of

conflicts are negotiated between the parties involved. This has been my experience in the schools that I have been involved, whether as a teacher, parent or leader.

I am hopeful that many schools will respond with evidence of policy frameworks in place, stories of successful navigation through conflict by following these policy frameworks and possibly some recognition that we can all do better for the sake of our young people who are looking to us for hope in a future that is better for us all.

Upon rereading the terms of reference, my submission addresses (b), (d), (e), (h) directly and the other sections more indirectly. I would be happy to be contacted for any clarification if required.

Yours Sincerely,

Adrian Bosker

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