

From: [REDACTED]
To: [House of Assembly - GAA](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Submission to the Inquiry into Discrimination and Bullying in Tasmanian Schools
Date: Friday, 30 August 2024 5:07:55 PM

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to provide a comprehensive submission to the Inquiry into Discrimination and Bullying in Tasmanian Schools. My name is Bradley Cullen, and I am the parent of children currently attending Trevallyn Primary School in Tasmania. The issues of discrimination and bullying in schools are particularly significant to me, as I have experienced them firsthand during my school years in New South Wales and am now deeply concerned for my children's safety and well-being within the Tasmanian school system.

1. Introduction

My experiences with bullying during my school years in New South Wales between 2000 and 2012 have left lasting scars. As a young student, I was subjected to relentless bullying due to my sexual orientation, which was compounded by a lack of support and understanding from the school community. These experiences have deeply impacted my life, influencing my mental health, self-esteem, and overall sense of self-worth. Now, as a parent, I am particularly anxious about the environment my children are growing up in, especially given that they have a gay father. The fear that they might endure the same pain and isolation that I did is a constant source of concern.

2. Response to Terms of Reference

I wish to address several key points within the Committee's Terms of Reference, drawing from both my personal experiences and my current concerns as a parent:

(a) Inquiry into Discrimination, Prohibited Conduct, Unequal Treatment, Bullying, and Harassment

During my time at school, I encountered significant discrimination and bullying because of my sexual orientation. The environment was hostile, and there was a clear lack of support systems in place to address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students. The only support offered was through a Christian group, which, while well-intentioned, did not cater to my needs and often reinforced feelings of shame and isolation. I felt pressured to conceal my true identity in order to fit in and avoid further bullying, a common experience among my peers who are now openly gay. The direct harassment I faced, coupled with the school's failure to provide adequate support, serves as a stark reminder of the importance of addressing both direct and indirect forms of discrimination in schools.

(b) Measures to Prevent and Remedy Discrimination and Bullying

From my experiences, it is clear that more needs to be done to prevent and remedy discrimination and bullying in schools. I strongly advocate for the introduction of comprehensive educational programmes that promote understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals and families. Such education should begin at an early age, helping to normalise diversity and create a more inclusive school environment. Additionally, schools must implement and enforce robust anti-bullying policies that specifically protect LGBTQ+ students and their families. These policies should outline clear procedures for reporting and addressing incidents of bullying, ensuring that all reports are taken seriously and acted upon promptly.

(c) Obligations and Duties under the Anti-Discrimination Act 1998

Under the Anti-Discrimination Act 1998, Tasmanian schools are legally obligated to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all students and staff. However, I am concerned that these obligations are not always fully met, particularly with respect to LGBTQ+ students. It is essential that schools are held accountable for their compliance with these obligations. This includes providing regular training for teachers and staff on how to recognise and address discrimination and bullying effectively. Schools should also ensure that their policies are transparent and that students and parents are fully aware of the support systems available to them.

(d) Efforts and Recommendations for Meeting Obligations

To effectively meet their obligations under the Anti-Discrimination Act 1998, schools should adopt a proactive approach to fostering diversity and inclusion. This can be achieved through a variety of initiatives, including:

- **Regular Training for Staff:** Ensuring that all teachers and staff receive regular training on LGBTQ+ issues and anti-bullying strategies.
- **Inclusive Curricula:** Incorporating LGBTQ+ education into the broader school curriculum to normalise diversity and challenge stereotypes.
- **Support Systems:** Establishing confidential support systems for students who may be at risk of discrimination or bullying, including counselling services and peer support groups.
- **Parental Engagement:** Actively involving parents in discussions about diversity and inclusion, providing resources to help them support their children at home.

These efforts are crucial in creating a school culture that values diversity and ensures that all students feel safe and supported.

(e) Legislative and Policy Reforms

In addition to the measures outlined above, I believe that further legislative and policy reforms are needed to ensure that schools are fully equipped to tackle discrimination and bullying. These reforms should include:

- **Mandatory LGBTQ+ Education:** Requiring schools to include education on LGBTQ+ issues as part of their curricula, with a focus on promoting understanding and acceptance.
- **Enhanced Anti-Bullying Policies:** Strengthening anti-bullying policies to explicitly protect LGBTQ+ students and families, with clear guidelines on how to handle incidents of bullying and discrimination.
- **Monitoring and Enforcement:** Establishing mechanisms to monitor schools' compliance with anti-discrimination laws and policies, ensuring that they are effectively implemented and enforced. Schools that fail to meet their obligations should be subject to review and required to take corrective action.

(f) Impact on Student Participation, Retention, and Educational Outcomes

The impact of discrimination and bullying on students can be profound and long-lasting. For students, it can lead to poor academic performance, mental health issues, and a sense of alienation from the school community. The emotional scars left by bullying can persist into adulthood, affecting relationships, career prospects, and overall well-being. For staff, discrimination and bullying can create a hostile work environment, leading to difficulties in recruitment, retention, and career development. It is essential that these impacts are fully considered when developing policies and interventions to address these issues.

(g) Public Consultation

I believe it is vital that the voices of those directly affected by discrimination and bullying are heard during this inquiry. Public consultations should include input from LGBTQ+ individuals,

families, and advocacy groups to ensure that the measures adopted genuinely address the needs of those most vulnerable to discrimination and bullying. The lived experiences of those who have been marginalised by the current system are invaluable in shaping effective and meaningful change.

(h) Other Matters

In addition to the points raised, I would like to emphasise the importance of creating a school culture that actively celebrates diversity. Schools should take steps to foster a sense of belonging among all students, regardless of their background or identity. This can be achieved through school-wide diversity events, inclusive curricula, and the establishment of support groups for LGBTQ+ students. It is also crucial that parents are involved in these efforts, as they play a key role in supporting their children and reinforcing the values of acceptance and respect at home.

3. The Lasting Impact on My Life

The bullying I experienced during my school years has had a long-lasting impact on my life. The feelings of shame and isolation that I felt as a young student continue to affect my self-esteem and mental health. These experiences have shaped my views on the school environment, making me acutely aware of the potential dangers that my own children could face in a system that does not fully support or protect them. My experiences have also influenced my approach to parenting, as I strive to ensure that my children grow up in an environment where they feel safe, accepted, and able to be themselves.

4. Current Concerns as a Parent in Tasmania

As a parent, my primary concern is the safety and well-being of my children, especially my son who currently attends Trevallyn Primary School in Tasmania. While Tasmania has made significant strides in promoting diversity and inclusion, I am still deeply concerned about the environment in which my children are growing up. The societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, although improving, are still evolving, and this evolution is reflected in the school environment. I worry that my son may face bullying or discrimination because he has a gay father, and I am anxious about how the school's policies and staff will respond if such incidents occur.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. The issues of discrimination and bullying in Tasmanian schools require urgent attention, and I hope that my submission will help inform the Committee's work in developing effective solutions. It is my hope that by addressing these issues head-on, we can create a school environment where all students feel safe, valued, and supported.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if further information is required. I am comfortable with my submission being published in full, and I do not wish for any parts to remain confidential.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind Regards

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