

From: [Vanderaa, Sonja](#)
To: [Shane Donnelly](#)
Subject: Submission to Select Committee on Child Protection
Date: Friday, 12 November 2010 3:38:54 PM

Dear Select Committee Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback in regard to Child Protection. All my comments related to children and young people in care. I would be grateful if the specifics of my information could remain confidential.

My role: working as a behaviour consultant in Learning Services South in the Department of Education (DoE). This involves a proactive component running professional learning in the area of Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support and, a reactive component which involves leading school teams in intensive, individual student intervention. This involves working with Child Protection (CP) staff on a regular basis.

As a result of neglect and abuse students have trauma related diagnoses. In practice this means they have difficulty with schooling. Despite the fact that my role is for all students in K-10, **the majority of students that I work with are in Care.**

Please find below a summary of issues I would like The Committee to consider:

b) Mechanisms currently in place, and where improvements can be made ...

What's going well?

Care Teams (weekly/fortnightly meetings of key adults involved with student), alignment of DoE and CP regions, increased interaction of a proactive nature between CP and DoE in the last couple of years, e.g. staff attending the same professional learning on trauma, participation of Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) staff in Care Teams, access to advice from CP senior practice consultant (this is highly valued), involvement from CP staff at relevant network meetings. I've seen a real shift toward more collaborative work and greater understanding between DoE and CP.

What needs improving?

Where's the data in regard to behaviour incidents which impact on attendance for students in care e.g. suspension, exemption to part-time enrolment? How is this being used to gain access to services to meet the needs for this group of students? Few schools currently have quality data beyond the standard suspension/absences. For the purposes of successful intervention data is needed. Why are literacy and numeracy results tracked (e.g. NAPLAN) but not social learning/behaviour? School attendance and suspension data are significantly impacted by the severity and frequency of behavioural incidents, yet there seems to be little interest in tracking this.

Possible solution: Develop compulsory and consistent data collection processes across the state to identify areas of social skills that need to be addressed for individual students. This data needs to be compared to data for peers who are not in care. Simple tools such as the University of Washington Social Skills Checklist and Skill Streaming are already available.

Research indicates that for students with significantly challenging behaviour, function-based assessment (FBA) is essential to improve outcomes. Data from an FBA is critical. Again, there are simple, evidence-based tools e.g. Functional Assessment Checklist for Teachers and Staff (FACTS) which could provide the necessary information to develop effective support plans.

Ongoing and systematic professional learning for school staff (including principals and school leaders), based on needs identified in the data in regard to working with children who have experienced neglect and abuse related trauma is vital.

Systems to support staff in developing, delivering and attending, ongoing professional learning in the area of trauma. Again, there is no shortage of evidence-based practices, we even have access to this expertise, but there needs to be recognition and support for this at a systems level to make it a priority in terms of both budgeting and time.

Possible solution: Establish interagency professional learning team to develop a program based on data. A budget to assist with this would be essential.

Attention to proactive practices. I am frustrated by hearing from staff, that a student with a history of trauma 'has never really had friends' or 'he's had problems since kinder.' There is a lack of screening tools which lead to early identification and intervention in the area of behaviour.

Possible solution: An interagency group (CP, ACF, Catholic Ed, DoE) has begun to develop a Behaviour Rating Scale. The purpose of this is to:

- prioritise requests for assistance
- develop a shared language to be used across agencies
- decrease stigma by using more objective language
- track severity of behaviour incidents (both externalising and internalising)
- monitor effectiveness of interventions

This is work that everyone is taking on, on top of their existing workloads, in an effort to improve student outcomes. Additional funding to ensure that professional learning in how to use this assessment tool is required.

Mandate an additional section to the existing requirement that all students in Care have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This needs to include a compulsory section on reactive strategies as well as proactive strategies (which must be based on Person Centred Planning and Functional Behaviour Assessment process).

Communication across agencies and states. I am very concerned that a student who had been in rostered care in Tasmania, had extensive assessments from a variety of agencies and thorough documentation on ways to support him (and keep others safe), was re-united with his family interstate without **any** of this information being passed on to the relevant agencies. He was enrolled at a school without any of this background being able to support him. This could only further compound the impact of trauma for the child, family and new school community. I've been advised that Child Protection

interstate have also had involvement now, over many months. The school psychologist has made contact with me to gather information – months late – to see what information could be forwarded. I have taken advice from our Legal Services Unit and forwarded this information.

Possible solution: Develop protocols for forwarding all key information as students change areas and states.

Budget allocations need to give Child Protection the capacity to fund mentors and therapeutic programs for students whose trauma has a significant impact on their capacity to engage in an educational program. Stringent criteria could measure the effectiveness of this funding, protecting limited resources. Although there is enough evidence-based practice to indicate what's effective in this area, there are situations where a short-term funding shortfall leads to a longer-term blowout. E.g. a foster parent says a child needs to be at school full-time for the home placement to be sustainable. The school puts in place a program which combines participation in the classroom and off-site therapeutic activities (recommended by the Care Team), and requests support for funding the therapeutic aspects of the program from CP. If the answer is yes, there is the capacity to gradually reduce the intensive support, fading it out over time. If the answer is no, the student is unable to sustain full-time school attendance (usually due to safety issues), and the corollary of this can be the collapse of the home placement and the return of the student to rostered care, financial costs of which are even higher. That's not to mention the compounding trauma for the child in losing so many key adults and a sense of home.

Possible solution: Use data to increase political awareness of the issues.

Supervision and performance management of Child Protection workers. Observations would indicate that the current processes are ineffective. The degree of variability in the professionalism of staff can be marked. When the legal guardian of a child turns up to a meeting late, without a pen or diary and tends not to follow up with meeting actions, this is a concern. Most workers are exceptional but the worst ones were exceptionally unprofessional and even caused damage to the students they worked with.

Possible solution: Ensure Team Leaders and senior staff have time to implement processes.

I would be happy to speak to this submission should it be required.

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