

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **STUDENT WELFARE AND DISCIPLINE**

#### **AIMS OF THE CHAPTER**

The pursuit of effective teaching and learning is a central concern of public education. That pursuit was a unifying theme in the earlier consideration of teacher professionalism and curriculum and pedagogy (Chapters 1 and 2) as well as the requirements of a good foundation for young people's schooling (Chapter 3). Less obviously than in preceding chapters, the issue of effective classroom practices, or *pedagogy*, again looms significant in the consideration of student welfare and discipline. However, the appropriate starting points for exploring this important aspect of public education are the practical experiences and impressions of the innumerable teachers, students and parents who have made student misbehaviour one of the dominant themes of the present Inquiry. These opinions are summarised in Part 1 of the chapter. The focus of the commentaries has been a range of 'external' factors that impair young people's orderly and effective participation in learning. Those considerations have extended from matters as broad as changing patterns of child and youth behaviour and questioning the stability and socialising role of today's families, to the effect of emotional and mental disorders on students' responses to correction by teachers and school administrators.

The Inquiry's intention in this chapter is to give due weight to the lived experience of teachers and school communities with respect to student misbehaviour. The aim will be to respond with practical recommendations that will improve the management of problems that, broadly speaking, are imported into the learning situation. What the Inquiry wishes to avoid is the exclusion from consideration of the contribution that education practices themselves make to student disengagement and student misbehaviour. Part 2 of the chapter is devoted to this 'whole of school' perspective on indiscipline. Essentially, what will be attempted is an extension of the equation linking students' behavioural dispositions and circumstances, on the one hand, and their behaviour in the classroom and school, on the other, to take account of the amplifying or calming effect of a school's climate and educational practices.

#### **PART 1 - PROBLEMS IMPORTED INTO THE LEARNING SITUATION**

##### **Evidence presented to the Inquiry**

Many teachers have suggested that the problem of student indiscipline has become more severe in recent times, although principals of the schools affected have indicated that most of the difficulties have been caused by around five per cent or less of students. There has been little challenge to this estimate which is also consistent with the picture painted by students throughout the Inquiry. All parties agree that although small in number, the misbehaving students can disrupt learning and demoralise teachers and fellow students. Senior students at one country high school described student misbehaviour as the major problem of the public education system. Primary pupils at another country school painted a similar picture stating that the first requirement of a misbehaving student is that he or she should apologise for disrupting the work of fellow students.

Using the processes of investigation available to it - submissions, public hearings, discussions with teachers, parents and students - the Inquiry has been left in no doubt about the reality of student indiscipline. However, the issue of just how much more severe the problem is today than it was in previous decades is unclear because of the absence of consistent data. Moreover, the problem is not evenly spread across all schools. Some, usually located in socio-economically better off areas, make no mention of it, while in others it occupies a disproportionate share of staff time and energy. The same processes of inquiry that have drawn unrestrained comment on student indiscipline, have almost without exception across more than 140 schools failed to elicit evidence of, or comments upon, student violence. As will be seen from the statements that follow, the spotlight has been upon swearing, confronting behaviour, rudeness, disobedience, inattention, inappropriate clowning, refusing to cooperate, and generally disrupting the business of learning.

### **Scale and impact of misbehaviour**

A rural teacher expressed frustration with the problem of indiscipline in his rural high school, declaring:

At present these students have to be tolerated for far too long, with a detrimental effect on both staff and student welfare. What seems to be needed is a separate institution to house the recalcitrants...

Despite obviously feeling pressured by the problem of student misbehaviour, when the teacher who made the above comment calculated the number of students among 1,000 pupils requiring special attention, his estimate (2.5%) was half of the proportion generally nominated by principals.

A teacher at a high school in the state's north observed:

Having had a visit by the Inquiry to our school I believe it was the students who identified the single biggest factor that could destroy public education - poor discipline. Teachers and good students have to deal with students who claim 'You can't tell me what to do.' Solve this and you will save the education of the majority.

The P&C at another high school in the north stated in a submission:

We are dismayed that unruly students often prohibit a good learning environment. Teachers disciplining these students absorb considerable class time...Schools must have greater flexibility in dealing with disruptive students.

Related submissions were received from two schools in the state's west:

There is no denying that behaviour problems are becoming more and more the norm. Many students now come from itinerant or unsettled families. In many cases neither parent has a job. Many bring family and neighbourhood problems to school. It is expected that the school fix these problems. As a staff we are becoming disillusioned with our inability to cope with an increasing welfare workload ... Unruly children are costing valuable learning time in a typical classroom.

Student behaviour and discipline is one of the most off-putting things about teaching today and a massive issue at this school. [I mean] children who, despite our best efforts to make class work interesting and appealing, will not stay in the room, will not do as they are asked, and are constantly disruptive, are aggressive towards other children and sometimes staff with little provocation, who use abusive language to teachers and other children. How do you teach effectively when discipline takes up so much of your teaching time?

A teacher at a Sydney high school added:

We have increasing numbers of disruptive, defiant and behaviour disordered students, but no supplementary or specialist staff on site, no special lesson programs offered to us, no additional accommodation or funding and release for teacher training. Our Learning Support teacher has specialist training to help staff and students in this area of behaviour disorders, but is only allocated 1.5 days per week for all her work and we have 900 students ... my colleagues are becoming very demoralised and burnt out by what seems like a war of attrition in the classroom and the playground.

### **Responses to misbehaviour/behavioural problems**

A Teachers' Association submitted that departmental suspension policy has exacerbated the problem of managing students with challenging behaviour:

The amount of documentation and warnings that have to be given to students undermine their effectiveness. The procedures are very time consuming and lead students to believe that there are no consequences for their poor behaviour with a resultant impact on teacher morale, health and welfare.

The contribution made by school counsellors to dealing with student discipline and welfare problems is greatly appreciated by school staff, but seen to be inadequate to the task. One Sydney high school has submitted "To expect that one person, servicing more than one school can deal adequately with the issues now facing our youth is ludicrous". The following comment by the staff of a Western Sydney high school is typical of other submissions on this point:

The quality of counselling services is severely limited by excessive caseloads and documentation requirements...Counsellors are forced to fight a rearguard action to address the symptoms of a problem that belongs to society as a whole. In a school with 973 students we have 0.7 of the services of a school counsellor. The potential client base for each school counsellor is around one thousand students and their families. This client base is stretched over two or more schools with the needs of each school population often being grossly different. At a school like ours at least 25% of students have had some contact with the school counsellor during their stay at the school with many being regular clients requiring repeat testing, ongoing documentation, reporting, liaison with

school staff, parents and outside agencies as well as personal counselling. Some school counsellor work activities are redundant and little more than semi-legal documentation, for example, retrospective investigations into long suspensions, long after the suspensions have been resolved or students have been expelled from school.

The theme of counsellors having little time for direct work with students was equally present in the comments of country teachers and parents as the following submission from a country teacher illustrates:

School mirrors society with increasing social and emotional concerns impacting on our students' lives and, consequently, their education. The Department needs to acknowledge the growth in requirements for counsellor time in schools...We are isolated and do not, like many towns in the state, have access to local mental health providers.

Two high school counsellors commented on their profession becoming an "endangered species":

The DET keeps giving counsellors new responsibilities, including: management of critical incidents (for example, the sudden death of a teacher, youth suicide, a natural disaster), child protection, mental health programs (for example, prevention of depression, anti-bullying programs), and integration. At the same time, the greater demand for accountability has generated overwhelming paperwork for counsellors ... There is a high attrition rate among counsellors often due to burnout and problems in attracting people to the job, so that school counsellors are becoming an endangered species.

### **What should be done?**

Several submissions from P&C groups as well as parents encountered during school visits and public hearings, have spoken of the jettisoning of 'difficult' students by private schools and the acceptance of all comers by public schools. There have been frequent calls for private schools to deal with their own difficulties rather than simply passing them on to the public sector. Another frequently made suggestion for improving the situation is an expansion in the number of school counsellors and a trimming of the documentation side of their work to allow a greater focus on direct service to students. Yet a further suggestion that appeared in some submissions but which more often was put directly by the executive staff of schools during Inquiry visits, was that many schools need an additional deputy principal or head teacher to assume responsibility for discipline and student welfare. A variant of this opinion was that schools need an additional 'student welfare' teacher to deal with students with behavioural and emotional problems. Some other schools emphasised the need for more specialised 'social' assistance in the form of a school social worker who could liaise with families, work with teachers in the management of difficult students and act as a link with social agencies and social services. These suggestions will be taken up later in the recommendations section of this chapter.

On the question of the number of counsellors needed, a Sydney metropolitan boys high school recommended that every school with 600 or more students should have a full time school counsellor. "This would ensure that all students who are experiencing difficulties or distress could access psychological services." The Inquiry team has taken the many opportunities available to question counsellors on the proportion of their time devoted to assessment and documentation. The consistent answer has been approximately 40-50%. This issue will be the subject of detailed attention in later chapters, particularly in the Inquiry's review of the 'integration' of students with disabilities into mainstream classes.

Additional thoughts and suggestions have been submitted to the Inquiry. The parent of a student with learning difficulties noted that bad behaviour is often the result of poor learning, not the cause. "Earlier identification and support of learning difficulty students could drastically reduce the number of behaviour problem children." A teacher at a Central Coast high school saw the necessity for 'time out' rooms for children to recover their equanimity, while another in the Hunter region considered that teachers need more authority to deal with recalcitrant students. The same remark was occasionally made in meetings with staff but even direct questioning on what specifically was required beyond existing punishments, failed to draw an answer. A Teachers' Association expressed support for a government decision to spend \$46 million over four years to assist students with behavioural problems by establishing 11 new special schools and 17 tutorial centres to cater for these students' needs. On the other hand, a Sydney high school believed that instead of making the aforementioned investment in behaviourally challenged students, the Government should better resource schools that already cater for students with such behaviour, including students already rejected from other government and private schools - "the fish John West rejected".

When it comes to reasons for the lack of student discipline, various explanations are offered. It has been common to hear the claim that poor discipline can be traced to the increasing number of dysfunctional families within the community. Some teachers argue that parents should shoulder greater responsibility for their children's behaviour. In a similar vein, there is concern that an increased recognition of the rights of students has not been accompanied by an acceptance of the responsibilities that such rights entail. Others have argued that teachers no longer have a legitimate set of powers or adequate deterrents to support their authority in classrooms and schools. Some teachers believe that the number of behaviourally and emotionally disturbed young people in schools has increased with the integration of special needs children into normal classrooms.

## **SYSTEM RESPONSES TO BEHAVIOURALLY DISTURBED AND DISENGAGING STUDENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

It is useful to consider the foregoing views of teachers, students and parents about what is needed in the way of support and behaviour programs, against the DET's conception of what is, in fact, being provided. Relevant in this context is a wide range of DET programs and services covering students who are disruptive and poorly behaved in school, students who are disengaging from school, and young people who are described as being 'at risk.' There are also a small number of programs run in collaboration with the NSW Department of Health. Figure 5.1 depicts the continuum of services currently available for students with behaviour problems, from least to most serious. This continuum ranges from interventions teachers themselves are expected to initiate, to support services for students and teachers, to locally developed tutorial centres, to centres for young people with

severe emotional/mental health problems and/or behavioural problems. There are counterpart arrangements in other Australian states.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 5.1: Range of Programs for responding to behaviourally disturbed and/or disengaged students and young people**

<b>School level services</b>				<b>District/community services</b>			
TEACHERS AND OTHER SCHOOL - BASED PERSONNEL	FUNDING SUPPORT/ ITINERANT SUPPORT TEACHERS- BEHAVIOUR	GATEWAY PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE 'AT RISK'	TUTORIAL CENTRES – COMBINATION OF DISTRICT AND SCHOOL RESOURCES	BEHAVIOUR SCHOOLS - SEVERE BEHAVIOUR DISORDERS	DET CENTRES FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISORDERS	SCHOOLS WITHIN DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE	DET- DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CENTRES FOR TREATING MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

These services will be dealt with in three groups. First, services based in schools will be examined, and some needed additional innovations proposed. Second, services in the middle of the continuum will be described, noting that considerable additional resources are currently being directed to some of them. And third, services that fall more at the mental health end of the continuum will be examined, and suggestions for improvements in service provision for the minority of disturbed and highly disruptive students put forward.

### **School level services**

Starting on the left of the continuum, teachers have an important responsibility for enforcing guidelines for appropriate behaviour and disciplinary procedures developed at school level<sup>2</sup>. Many minor infractions are resolved on a daily basis by teachers in their classrooms. There is a body of research and other information available that can guide teachers in their handling of disruptive behaviour in the classroom. It is more appropriate to review this resource in a later chapter in the context of teacher preparation. It is mentioned here to mark its potential usefulness. When teacher interventions fail, the DET provides a range of school-based personnel to assist teachers with student behaviour problems. These include:

- School counsellors;
- Executive staff (such as deputy principals); and

<sup>1</sup> The Victorian Department of Education, for example, has a range of short-term alternative settings for students with behavioural problems. These include community schools which provide on-going schooling for secondary students who have difficulty adjusting to the procedures of mainstream schools; special education units for limited term referral; medical centres for students with psychiatric problems; teaching units, usually attached to mainstream schools, offering students from nearby schools specialized teaching for a limited time; community based residential units providing educational support for residents in protective care; and a number of district based, short-term alternative settings for students experiencing difficulties in school ( Murphy, C., (1996) Victorian Department of Education: Children and youth with emotional or behavioural problems, in J. Izard and J. Evans (Eds). *Student Behaviour – Policies, Interventions and Evaluations*, Camberwell, The Australian Council for Educational Research, pp. 69-84

<sup>2</sup> There is considerable variation among these in different schools. Whole-school programs to raise the standard of behaviour of *all* students are examined in the second part of this chapter.

- Home-school and school-community liaison officers (including Aboriginal education assistants).

There are currently 770 school counsellors in NSW schools, and they constitute the primary behavioural specialists in the system. The ratio of school counsellors to students is approximately 1:1000, with counsellors allocated to schools on a per capita numerical basis. Because many schools have less than 1000 students, most counsellors are responsible for students in more than one school. This is one reason why they are often not immediately available when teachers call on their services. As indicated above, the Inquiry has received many complaints about the numbers and availability of school counsellors, which means that they have limited time for follow up and tend to deal only with urgent cases. Recommendations concerning the number and allocation of school counsellors are included below. School executive staff have always been involved in student discipline and welfare, and this continues to be the case. The Inquiry has been concerned in some schools at the amount of time taken up in student discipline by executive staff, distracting them from their primary educational leadership role in the school. Various forms of school-community liaison officers are also provided to those schools which are deemed to need them. Like school executive staff, these personnel are not responsible solely for student behaviour, although it forms a significant part of their workload.

The second stage on the continuum covers two other forms of system support provided directly to schools. Funding Support is currently available for students who have been diagnosed with a mental health problem or have certain kinds of behaviour disorders (such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder). Approximately 2,400 students in NSW currently receive support in relation to mental health and behavioural issues under this program. This represents well under 1% of all students in government schools, and assists teachers with a small minority of students whose behavioural problems relate to diagnosable conditions. There are also approximately 360 itinerant support teachers (behaviour) based in District Offices and available to schools. Apart from working individually with a caseload of students with behavioural problems, the itinerant teachers also work with each referred child's classroom teacher, helping to instil greater skills and confidence in handling behaviourally challenging students. The Inquiry has heard very mixed assessments of the work of the itinerant behaviour teachers. In some districts, their services are readily available and valued; in others, teachers feel that their provision of assistance is 'too little, too late'.

### **Special programs and facilities for students with behaviour problems**

The third kind of service along the continuum goes under the title of *Gateway Programs*, and covers DET instigated services for young people who are disengaging from school or have already done so. These programs had their origins in the Drug Summit that took place in 1999, where concern was expressed over young people in South Western Sydney who were disengaging from school and deemed to be 'at risk' of becoming involved with drugs. The program has evolved into a multi-faceted, locally based service that can be used flexibly to support the educational, social and welfare needs of young people in any location whose actions appear destined to result in self harm in one form or another. In this respect, the Gateway Program builds on the success of the Commonwealth-funded Full Service Schools Program that developed pathways and support services for at-risk young people. The program is sustained by the Equity Coordination Unit within the Student Services and Equity Directorate of the DET. Using existing sources of funds, a small team comprising six education officers work with principals and schools to devise

locally-relevant responses to young people's disengagement from schools or training programs. The generic term *Gateway* appears to denote programs that utilise one or more of the following program elements:

- i. Identification and case management of young people through counselling, academic and vocational support, and referrals to other agencies;
- ii. individual education plans for identified young people, based on interests and capabilities and achievable targets;
- iii. vocational and life skills courses, including TAFE modules that lead to other TAFE courses that can be pursued once students leave school;
- iv. mentoring by suitable volunteers, including teachers, but primarily community volunteers and some young people who have been trained for the role by TAFE;
- v. training and development for parents and caregivers to increase their capacity to support their children (for example, programs addressing parenting, conflict management, literacy, school procedures and learning about the community), and
- vi. training and development of teachers and other school staff focused on how to develop the strengths of young people at risk (for example, improving teaching practices and student engagement, curriculum ideas, relationship building, behaviour management and creating more responsive classrooms and school organisation).

Next on the continuum are tutorial centres which, for more than a decade, have been a useful adjunct to the management of secondary students whose behaviour is unacceptable. They have been funded by a combination of district and school resources and largely developed on the basis of local initiative. Some are located within schools; others are to be found in various sites like unused community facilities, community sports centres, Police and Community Youth Clubs and former teacher housing residences. Their operation is flexible but the general pattern is for students, after a settling-in period, to maintain partial attendance in their normal classes and continue, as far as practicable, to keep up with their lessons. In addition, students receive help with basic skills and work on identifying and remedying problem behaviour. Some of the general features of tutorial centres are illustrated below in relation to centres developed by Narooma and Shoalhaven High Schools.

### **Two examples of tutorial centres**

#### **Narooma High School Tutorial Centre**

The Tutorial Centre's program caters for 4-6 students who, for one reason or another, have difficulty coping with mainstream schooling. The Centre operates in a room within a community sports centre under the direction of a member of the High School staff assisted by a teacher's aide. The program had only been operating for some weeks at the time it was visited by the Inquiry in March, 2002. The primary points of interest, therefore, included the school's initiative in establishing a remedial centre in a separate community setting – an ambition contemplated by some other principals but not acted upon – and the careful planning of the program to give due attention to students' personal and academic needs. The staff of the Centre maintain close contact with each student's teacher so that the work undertaken is similar to that being attempted by the home class. The main aim of the program is to



encourage students to take responsibility for their behaviour and acquire social and academic skills that will enable them to manage themselves more considerately in the school setting.

Students attend the centre from 9.15am to 2.30 pm Monday to Wednesday. They attend sport on Wednesday afternoon and do normal lessons on Thursday and Friday. The 2.30pm closure allows the staff to debrief and review the students' behaviour and progress. Major areas to receive attention include conflict resolution, the enhancement of self-esteem, relaxation and stress management, and self-discipline. A weekly conduct card is maintained and signed each day by teachers and the student's parent/carer. The card identifies up to three behaviours that the student needs to improve. Work sessions at the Tutorial Centre range across academic subjects, life skills and group discussions. Maths, economics, nutrition and other subjects are integrated into engaging 'real-life' exercises, such as pooling students' money to shop for food that they then use to prepare a meal. The students set basic rules of conduct and also establish the consequences for breaking the rules. The aim is to create a safe, pleasant and non-threatening environment.

Enrolment at the Tutorial Centre requires the consent and support of the student's parent/guardian. Family involvement is a high priority and parents are encouraged to visit the Centre regularly. The teachers also attempt to maintain close links with the home through telephone calls, letters and awards. There is a Management Committee that meets frequently to review students' progress and future strategies. There is an emphasis upon re-integration into mainstream schooling or, for older students, transition to the workforce or further training.

### **Shoalhaven High School**

The Park Road Centre, situated in the Police and Community Youth Club (PCYC) adjacent to Shoalhaven High School, provides an alternative education to students who are school refusers and/or long-term truants. These students are often motivated to learn, but find the school environment intimidating and hostile. Often such students have emotional problems, eating disorders and/or drug and alcohol addiction, or they may have been bullied at school. Without a facility such as Park Road, many would slip through the net and fail to achieve an educational qualification.

The Park Road Centre offers an informal setting in a comfortable room for up to eight students at a time. These students take a full academic curriculum through the Karabar Distance Education Centre, and are assisted in their studies by a teacher and teacher's aide. Many of the students are unable to be with large groups of people and become distressed in almost any social situation. They attend Park Road for three days a week, working on their own at home for the other two days. The coordinator-teacher at the Centre observes that the social interaction between students is a key component of their experience at Park Road, and a central element in enabling many to integrate back into regular high school. Students can undertake secondary education up to the School Certificate at Park Road, and then if they choose, can attend Shoalhaven High for the Higher School Certificate. There is close liaison and cooperation between the school and the centre. In addition, the Park Road Centre provides other assistance to its students, including relaxation training, attendance at counselling and psychiatric sessions, and social outings. The aim is to help students become more confident and more able to handle unfamiliar social situations and other requirements of normal life.

Over the years, the Centre has developed expertise in handling the sensitivities of its student population, and has seen many students successfully complete the School Certificate and often, the Higher School Certificate. A graduate of the Centre went on to be dux of the High School. Park Road represents a creative and energetic response to a group of students whose needs cannot be met in the regular school environment.

Also in the middle of the continuum are DET operated Behaviour Schools for students whose behaviour is unacceptable but considered modifiable. These schools service students who are deemed not to be suffering from mental health problems. Recently, the NSW Government agreed to the creation of 11 new behaviour schools located in areas where there is an identified ongoing need for their services. They will cater for two groups of students. The first comprises those in Years 8-10 who are unlikely to return to a regular school setting. The aim is to provide these students with specialist support to increase their social skills, literacy and numeracy, vocational preparation and transition to an independent adult life style. The second group comprises students who are in Years 7 and 8, and who are likely to return to a mainstream setting. The aims with this group include intensive intervention on specific behavioural problems, maintenance in key learning areas and support for reintegration into a mainstream high school. Students in Years 5 and 6 who have exhausted all available school and district options for managing their behaviour may also be referred to the new schools.

### **Mental health services**

Finally to the right of the continuum are services for students with mental health problems and students in trouble with the law. First, centres and programs under the Department's sole control cater for students with emotional disorders of a less serious kind than would require treatment at the combined Health/Education facilities. Next, schools within the Department of Juvenile Justice, catering to the educational needs of incarcerated juvenile offenders, also occupy an extreme position on the range of services. There are nine such programs and the one visited by the Inquiry, Sheppards Park at Wagga Wagga, has an enthusiastic and competent staff providing intensive, even if basic, educational services. And third, there are three centres for students with severe mental health problems that are run jointly with the NSW Department of Health. These centres are at the right hand side of the continuum represented in Figure 5.1 because they are not located in schools and because they deal with the greatest degree of severity of the attendees' problems and the most highly specialised therapeutic services.

### **THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL SCHOOL-LEVEL SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS IN HANDLING STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES**

It should be evident from the above summary, that a wide range of services to assist students with varying degrees of behavioural difficulty, is available to teachers and schools. However, despite the range of services provided, it is clear that teachers do not feel that their needs for support are being met. The pervasive problem of student misbehaviour that is not readily amenable to day to day management, and that is often grounded in causes beyond the classroom, remains. Teachers have frequently referred to the spill-over of tensions and problems from students' homes into classrooms and schools, with teachers and other students bearing the brunt of problems that have their origins elsewhere. Parental neglect, sometimes associated with dependencies of various kinds, can mean some families do not support the

school in its attempt to encourage a measure of self-discipline and order in children's lives. These and many other factors that contribute to student indiscipline have already been alluded to by teachers, students and parents above. The Inquiry recognises that despite existing services to assist teachers, more is required. This is particularly so in some schools, which for various reasons, have more than their fair share of students with significant behaviour problems. Many teachers believe that what is needed is a school staff member who can specialise in assessing what is required to settle and re-engage misbehaving students and to link them and their families, where appropriate, to relevant community services.

Classroom teachers and school management are not well placed to fill the role that is envisaged here. Not only have the demands of the curriculum (refer to Chapter 2 of this Report) restricted the capacity of teachers to follow through on individual cases of indiscipline, they are also unfamiliar with the broad-based facilitating approach needed in working between students, teachers, families and service providers. In the past, when funds have been available, schools have recognised the need for specialised staff to concentrate on work of this nature. In some instances, they have drawn upon the resources provided by the Commonwealth *Disadvantaged Schools Program* to employ community liaison officers. More recently, as part of the Commonwealth *Full Service Schools Program*, schools have employed student support officers to develop school and community preventive strategies for young people on the brink of leaving or being excluded from school. While these examples have not focussed specifically upon indiscipline, they demonstrate the value of a specialist staff member to trace student difficulties beyond the school into family and community contexts. The Inquiry believes that a limited number of schools should be invited to pilot the appointment of an additional professional person in their schools to deal with behaviour problems.

Regarding the choice of professional role, there is an advantage in the selected schools nominating the professional background they believe to be most appropriate in their circumstances. However, that decision is not simply a matter of intuition: there exists a range of strategic priorities and they need to be carefully weighed in the context of local circumstances. The case justifying the school's choice should explicitly indicate the main objectives to be pursued on the basis of considerations such as the following:

- Linking individual students and families to relevant community services;
- Providing direct in-school counselling and support services;
- Devising and managing off-campus tutorial centres;
- Devising and helping to implement proactive 'whole-of-school' discipline and student welfare strategies (see Part 2);
- Connecting behavioural problems to classroom practices and the development of pedagogy; and
- Linking the school to efforts to strengthen the community of which it is a part (see later chapter on "School and Community").

The feasibility of creating the requested specialist staff role in all schools is qualified by at least four things:

- the overall cost,
- variations in the scale of the problem across schools,
- variations in the size of schools, and
- the need to pilot and assess different types of appointments and ways of operating.

The DET has constructed an index for the purpose of allocating specialist 'behaviour' staff across its 40 school districts according to need. The factors taken into account include population size, socio-economic status, learning difficulties, average daily attendance, and short and long term suspension rates. This index enables the question of variations in the scale of problems across schools of different sizes to be addressed in an objective way. The index also permits the possibility of concentrating on a limited number of schools in which behavioural problems are severe, thereby containing the costs to a manageable level. In the Inquiry's view, one third of the schools should be from outside metropolitan Sydney, one third should be primary schools, and half should have 800 or more students. Schools of 400 or fewer students should attract a 0.5 appointment.

The Inquiry recognises that this proposal is not without its potential pitfalls, as well as its advantages. The main danger is that the availability of a specialist role may cause other staff members simply to refer individual 'cases' and ignore aspects of the way the school operates that may be implicated in student misconduct, a theme taken up in Part 2 of this chapter. On the other hand, the problem of indiscipline among students is sufficiently widespread and serious in its educational and social consequences to warrant concentrated attention.

**Recommendation 5.1:** That a three year trial be conducted of a specialist discipline/student welfare role in each of twenty schools identified on the basis of objective data as having severe discipline problems. The selected schools should fulfil the scale, type and location requirements specified in the text.

Estimated annual cost of staffing \$65,000 x 17 = \$1.1 million

Estimated annual support costs \$15,000 x 17 = \$0.25 million

**Estimated total annual cost .....\$1.4million**

**Recommendation 5.2:** That an internal, collaborative evaluation be conducted by each of the twenty schools participating in the project, utilising the professional development and funding models recommended in Chapter 1. The aims should be twofold:

- i. to use the action research projects to lower the level of indiscipline in the relevant schools, and
- ii. to engage the professional community of each school in reflecting upon and improving teaching and other school practices that lift educational and behavioural outcomes.

### **School counsellors: need for a longer term plan**

The recommendations concerning pilot projects to improve and evaluate mental health services support, and discipline/student welfare roles, involve very modest expenditures and, in the opinion of the Inquiry, should be proceeded with as a matter of urgency. By the evidence of school staff and parents, as well as direct observation by the Inquiry, the services provided by school counsellors also represent a vital component of schools' responses to indiscipline and associated student welfare matters. The problem is that, apart from the heavy demands upon counsellors to assess and document issues of various kinds<sup>3</sup>, it would require miracle workers to deal effectively with their current caseloads. Only a proportion of students at any time need direct professional services but the evidence of a recent national mental health survey (discussed below) shows that counsellors, as primary carers within the school system, have a substantial number of potential clients. Furthermore, the role of counsellor extends to providing professional advice to executive and classroom teachers on ways of handling students' behavioural and emotional problems. The present counsellor/student ratio of approximately 1:1,000, with a counsellor's services sometimes spread over several schools, is quite unacceptable. As a guide to defining a more feasible and productive task, the Inquiry believes the DET should have the goal within a decade of reducing the counsellor/student ratio to 1: 500 with the services of each counsellor, in all but exceptional circumstances, spread over no more than two school communities.

The adoption of a longer than usual time frame for the accomplishment of this recommendation is in recognition of the cost of the proposal and the fact that it would require a sustained period of recruitment and training to acquire more than 700 additional teacher/psychologist counsellors. Indeed, an attempt to remedy the present situation rapidly looms as such a formidable task as to invite continued reliance on a range of stopgap measures. However, schools need an adequate supply of counselling services, together with the other reactive and proactive measures recommended in this chapter, if they are to handle the student behaviour and welfare challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Therefore, a long-term incremental plan is needed to begin to improve the situation with investments of money and other resources of a manageable scale.

**Recommendation 5.3:** That a ten-year recruitment and training plan be instituted to increase the number of school counsellors by 700 so that an effective counsellor/student ratio of approximately 1:500 is attained with the spread, in all but exceptional circumstances, of each counsellor's services being confined to two school communities.

**Estimated annual incremental cost...\$75,000 X 70 = \$5.25 million**  
**Estimated annual cost after 10 years.....= \$53 million**

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<sup>3</sup> A later chapter dealing with the 'integration' of students with disabilities will recommend a reduction in the frequency of some documentation involving school counsellors.

## **DISTRICT LEVEL SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY AND IDENTIFICATION OF ADDITIONAL NEED**

Before considering what additional district- or community-based services may be required, it is instructive to consider those actually provided in one school district. Problematic student behaviour of the kinds described in submissions to the Inquiry and reported during school visits, occur throughout the length and breadth of the state. While it is not possible to review the problems confronting each region and the ways in which they are being managed, in the interests of gaining a deeper understanding of the issues it is helpful to focus on the example of a single school district. One particular district has generously assisted the Inquiry to gain an appreciation of the multi-layered responses that can be made to students' behavioural difficulties. For present purposes, this structure is illustrated mainly by reference to two high schools, referred to as 'A' and 'B', both located within the said district. Although the Inquiry raises questions about one of the programs used by the schools, this should not be interpreted as indicating an overall critical view of what is being attempted. To the contrary, the Inquiry has been impressed by the diversity of methods used to deal with students' behavioural difficulties and commends the district for its initiatives. The one exception is a type of segregated control unit, discussion of which will follow consideration of the district's positive responses to students' behavioural problems.

When a school is unable to deal with a behaviour problem on its own, it turns to options available within the district. There are several. As one option, both High School A and High School B make use of an alternative educational facility (AEF). This program is conducted in cooperation with a youth centre conducted by a religious organisation. Students attend two days per week and spend the remaining three days in their home classrooms. The AEF scheme caters for less serious cases of disruptive or misbehaving students who are not seriously emotionally disturbed. It draws on Years 7-9 students from High Schools A and B and two nearby schools. Each school sends five students to the AEF and they remain in that program for two terms. The District Office handles admissions to the program which is staffed by a teacher and a teacher's aide who work with the students on basic numeracy, literacy and presentation skills, as well as problem behaviour identification and correction. The principal of High School A stresses that the AEF is a re-entry program and that 75% of the participants successfully reintegrate into mainstream classrooms. The principal attributes much of this success to the fact that within the small AEF class students can form a positive relationship with the teacher and they experience some personal success. It is believed that this new attitude towards both staff and learning is eventually transferred to mainstream classes. The principal of High School B adds another dimension to this explanation for the apparent success of the AEF project. He argues that apart from any other more specific factors, a young person's temporary placement on a program like AEF acts as a 'circuit breaker' that provides 'time out' and the opportunity for all parties to make a fresh start.

The second available option in the District is a *Links to Learning* program. This is described as being applicable to students caught up in various forms of socially distressing or otherwise unacceptable behaviour that impact upon their present or future learning. These are normally less serious than those leading to placement in the Alternative Education Facility. The program, which involves a period of placement with a community-based employment and training agency, is sufficiently flexible to deal at different times with the perpetrators and victims of unacceptable behaviour, such as bullying. In any one year, approximately 50 to 60 students from Years 7-9 at High Schools A and B participate in the scheme which is funded under the

DET Community Grants Program. Considerable success is claimed for the project with the rationale again revolving around the notions of 'relationship learning' and the opportunity for a fresh start.

In addition to the Alternative Education Facility and Links to Learning programs, there exists a district school for students with severe behaviour disorders. Another district initiative is a proposal for a Gateway Program to fund mental health services for the schools in the area. This emphasis on the need for additional mental health services reflects the conviction of the principals of both high schools that a significant proportion of the residuum of students with behavioural problems who do not respond to the 'circuit breaker' type programs described above, have emotional or mental health problems. This was illustrated in the case of High School B by reference to an audit of discipline stages attained by students in August of 2001. The stages range from 'A' (student is cooperative - the starting point for the year for most students), to 'F' (essentially that the student's behaviour is "intolerable") with ascending degrees of indiscipline in-between. With two-thirds of the year elapsed, all but approximately 50 students were still at Stage A. The principal believed that of the 50 who were experiencing difficulties, 30 had their behavioural problems resolved by participation in the AEF or the Links to Learning programs. In the opinion of the principal, the remaining 20 had severe personal problems for which specialist mental health assistance was needed.

These students require a more specialised response. Before describing current district provisions in this area, it is useful to consider evidence concerning the number of students who are in need of sophisticated behavioural and/or mental health services. That there exists a group of students whose aggressive or impulsive behaviour can be puzzling, if not intimidating, to staff and students, has been amply illustrated to the Inquiry. The community is indebted to the executive and classroom teachers who exercise restraint and compassion in their handling of such behaviour but its occurrence and prevalence should hardly be surprising. The child and adolescent component of a recent National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing found that some 14% of children and young people in Australia have mental health problems that are comparable in severity with problems seen in children actually attending a mental health clinic<sup>4</sup>. The survey had its methodological shortcomings<sup>5</sup> but it is authoritative in its field. The estimated percentage of children and young people nationally with mental health problems is two or three times the number typically said by NSW principals to be disruptive or aggressive. However, the national survey figure of 14% included a wide range of conditions, some of which would be less likely to thrust themselves upon the attention of teachers than aggressive behaviour, such as depression. On this latter point, the rough estimate of the principals - 5% - coincides with the national survey average figure of 5.2% for aggressive behaviour (slightly higher for younger males and slightly lower for older females).

The national survey also revealed that children and young people living in sole parent, step/blended or low income families were more likely to have mental health problems. Children and young people living with unemployed parents had a higher prevalence of what were termed 'externalising' problems than those in families where

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<sup>4</sup> Sawyer, M. G., Arney, F. M., Baghurst, P. A., Clark, J. J., Graetz, B. W., Kosky, R. J., Nurcombe, B., Patton, G. C., Prior, M. R., Raphael, B., Rey, J., Whaites, L. C., Zubrick, S. R., (2000) *The Mental Health of Young People in Australia: The Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*, Canberra, AusInfo

<sup>5</sup> Raphael, B., (2000) *Promoting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People. Discussion Paper: Key Principles and Directions*. Canberra, National Mental Health Working Group, Department of Health and Aged Care, pp. 6-7

parents were employed. The conclusion was drawn that the findings "...highlight the importance of social disadvantage on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing"<sup>6</sup>. The survey also found that those with more mental health problems and disorders consistently had lower self-esteem and functioned less well in school and peer activities.

The present Inquiry is wary of construing all major and persistent disengagement from schooling as a reflection of mental health problems. In Part 2 of this chapter evidence will be adduced of the part played by classroom practices and school environments in school discipline problems. Nevertheless, when behavioural problems do not yield to basic classroom management measures or 'circuit-breaking' procedures like those that have been described, then teachers deserve and need the support of mental health specialists. This was acknowledged in a recent discussion paper, *Promoting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People*, prepared by the National Mental Health Working Group:

Partnerships with schools are critical to ensure that each child's opportunities for learning and development in the school setting are maximised.<sup>7</sup>

A division of labour is recommended by the discussion paper: care for children and young people should be provided largely by primary care providers (including school counsellors); specialist mental health care should be available through child and adolescent mental health services, *which also need to provide specialist support and consultancy to other providers* (emphasis added). In the view of the Inquiry, while what is envisaged is sound, the supply of specialist services on-the-ground is too meagre for the plan to work uniformly well in New South Wales. Apart from the Inquiry's own observations, the national survey shows that the majority of young people do not receive help for their mental health problems. For those who do, school counsellors, family doctors and paediatricians provide most care, with skilled mental health services providing only a small proportion of care. This insight has shaped a key strategy recommended by the National Mental Health Working Group:

Thus it is critical that the mental health skills of those who see the most children and young people are supported and developed, with clear pathways to care and back-up from specialist child and adolescent mental health services.

The strategy recognises that a small number of children and young people with the most severe and complex disorders require tertiary level mental health care, including specialist clinics, high intensity and targeted community-based programs and, where appropriate, inpatient services.<sup>8</sup>

Returning to the school district under consideration, it becomes clear that although its objectively assessed level of student behaviour problems is high<sup>9</sup>, available mental health support services fall far short of what would be needed to fulfil the strategy outlined above. High Schools A and B simply cannot obtain the mental health guidance and clinical back-up that they require. This appears to be the explanation for why an otherwise forward looking district has had to resort to the type of control unit that is of concern to the Inquiry. The unit is located within a high school and

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<sup>6</sup> Raphael, B., op. cit. p.10

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.36

<sup>8</sup> Raphael, NB., op cit, pp. 41-42

<sup>9</sup> This is a reference to the previously mentioned formula developed within the DET to allocate behaviour specialists to the school Districts according to their comparative needs.



provides classes for seriously emotionally and behaviourally disturbed students who have not responded to earlier interventions. There are two classes with a total of twelve students. Each class has a teacher and teacher's aide and it is generally intended that students remain in the unit for two terms before being integrated back into their regular school. Some students spend part of the day in the unit and part of the day in normal classes. However, the behaviour of some students remains so problematic that they are likely to leave school before such re-integration takes place.

The unit is isolated from the remainder of the host school by a wire fence that, while not an impenetrable barrier - there is a gap in it and the gates are often open - marks the permissible limits of the students' movements. The reality of the students' containment was brought home when a member of the Inquiry staff was invited by one student in the unit to join her so that she could introduce two student friends from the general school community with whom she was conversing through the cyclone fence. Two explanations were given for this degree of isolation: first, it provides motivation for young people to improve their behaviour so that they can return to the mainstream program; and second it prevents young people in the unit from further alienating staff and possibly other students by their behaviour until they have been prepared to resume their place in the general school population.

Whatever the justification, when does the degree of control and segregation of students reach a point when its presence in schools is inappropriate? Figure 5.1 displayed a wide range of responses to students' behaviour difficulties. The last two (schools within the Department of Juvenile Justice and centres for treating mental/emotional disorders) involve collaboration with other departments in providing education services in settings necessarily and appropriately separated from mainstream schools. These are preceded by two other responses (centres for students with emotional disorders and behaviour schools) which also are provided in separate settings, while the earlier interventions presented along the continuum are extensions, or components of, mainstream schooling. It is a core characteristic of the school as a social institution, and essential to its broad purposes, that students participate on an equal basis in its educational and communal processes. It is antithetical to the required environment of tolerance and mutual respect for ideas and persons that one group should be visibly segregated for a substantial period inside an enclosed compound within the school grounds.

If it is the case that segregation is necessary for the good order of the school, then that should occur in another location that can meet the specific needs of the young people, whether they be psychiatric, behavioural or occupational. The examples of the tutorial centres conducted by Narooma and Shoalhaven High Schools illustrate the way an ordered but relaxed environment in a detached centre can assist young people to acquire the basic social skills needed to adjust to mainstream schooling. Schools are not part of the correctional system and the adoption of quasi-custodial practices, even on the most limited scale, should be rejected as being totally inappropriate.

In the Inquiry's view, if the intentions of the National Mental Health Working Group were to be implemented in districts of high need, then a serious beginning would have been made to providing schools with the level of mental health services that they require. It would eventually be less necessary to contain students whose behaviour is puzzling or intimidating or simply incomprehensible to the non-specialist, in units that have little to offer them by way of constructive help. However, the Inquiry is aware that not all regions are as lacking in school mental health support services as the district considered in some detail above. For example, the South Western Sydney Area Health Service (SWSAHS) offers, or is preparing to offer, the

types of assistance needed in areas where schools have to cope with high levels of puzzling, fractious student behaviour. At the level of helping teachers to understand and respond appropriately to emotional and mental disorders, a Mental Health Literacy Workshop currently is being piloted with DET cooperation in some schools in South Western Sydney<sup>10</sup>. The content includes coverage of aggressive and oppositional behaviour and should be of considerable practical help to teachers. Another focus for the prevention of conduct disorders is styles of parenting that are strongly associated with the development of emotional and behavioural problems in children. Programs designed to improve parent communication and behaviour management skills are being implemented in South Western and South Eastern Sydney with apparent benefits so far as the disruptive behaviour of children is concerned<sup>11</sup>. In relation to the encouragement of social skills in children, a program called Playing and Learning to Socialise (PALS) is being developed within day care and pre-school settings in SWSAHS<sup>12</sup>.

It is not necessary here to review the full range of support services provided by SWSAHS but beyond the valuable educational and general interventions described, it is useful to consider what clinical assessment and treatment services are provided to disturbed students. A *School Link* publication, 'Pathways to Mental health Care' clearly sets out the referral possibilities in three of the four Local Government Areas within the Area Health Region. Among the listed agencies are those providing individual assessment and treatment services. Because despite the best intentions, such published arrangements sometimes provide slow responses or leave workers without urgently needed assistance, an over-arching arrangement has been instituted that will broker some form of appropriate assistance within a reasonable period.

The Inquiry recommends that, for a trial period of three years, using the experience and relevant programs and arrangements of the South-West Sydney Area Health Service as a model, liaison officers should be appointed to ensure that similar arrangements are instituted in three Sydney and three non-Sydney school districts. The existence of the previously mentioned index of behavioural problems used to provide district level resources provides an objective means for determining which districts are most in need of additional assistance. In addition to educational and health promoting programs the liaison officers would also directly provide, or cause to be provided, mental health assessments and therapeutic services, including in-patient care in those cases where such assistance is warranted. The recommended pilot projects should be approached in a spirit of learning how to give practical effect to an already existing policy intention of providing mental health assistance to school students, and professional guidance to the school staff who are struggling to be of assistance to disturbed young people. Within the proposed three year trial both of the departments primarily involved would learn a great deal about the types of collaboration already acknowledged to be needed but generally unavailable to teachers, like those dealing with the twelve 'secured' students discussed earlier in this chapter.

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<sup>10</sup> Bensch, D., Brattoni-Rynsaardt, J., Burgess, B., Ferrington, R., Kotselas, P., Moffatt, B., Thorpe, D., (2002) *Mental Health Literacy Workshop*, School Link Program, Department of Education and Training, South Western Sydney Area Health Service

<sup>11</sup> Parada, R., Brennam, J., Crisante, L., (1999) *Does Altering Parents' Beliefs and Behaviours Decrease Non-compliant Aggressive Behaviour in Children? The Positive Parenting Program in Western Sydney*, Australian Society for Psychiatric Research Annual Scientific Meeting, 2-3 December, University of New South Wales;

<sup>12</sup> Wingecarribee Health Service, *PALS, A programme to Help Young Children Develop Social Skills*.

**Recommendation 5.4:** That mental health service liaison officers be appointed to support schools in six education Districts to respond appropriately to students with severe emotional and mental health problems in areas of high need. The Districts should be chosen on the basis of the formula discussed in the text and should include an equal number of Sydney and non-Sydney areas. The mental health services provided should range from support and guidance for school staff in their handling of disturbed students, to mental health assessments and the provision of direct services in non-clinical and clinical settings.

**Estimated staffing costs per annum: 6 x \$ 80,000 = \$ 480,000;  
(Responsible authority, NSW Health).**

**Recommendation 5.5:** That a Memorandum of Understanding be developed between the NSW Department of Health and the Department of Education and Training specifying the services to be provided within the six designated Districts and the mutual reporting and other arrangements for ensuring the successful management of the proposed cooperative scheme.

**Recommendation 5.6:** That a research team comprising representatives of the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health, in cooperation with staff of the six Districts and representatives of the schools concerned, progressively assess the service outcomes of the project.

## **PART 2 - INDISCIPLINE AND HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO CHANGING THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

Public discussion about student behaviour has often been framed by particular incidents of school violence that have been taken up by the media and conveyed to the public as a sign of malaise within public education. While safety and security within schools is essential for teaching and learning, the public focus on isolated, dramatic and newsworthy incidents distorts the debate. Research, both in Australia<sup>13</sup> and overseas<sup>14</sup> supports the observation of the present Inquiry that it is the ongoing, cumulative nature of minor infractions and disruptions, rather than their magnitude, that irritate and frustrate teachers and distract them and their classes from teaching and learning.

Indiscipline needs to be considered within an educational framework that gives priority to learning and teaching, and includes a balance of reactive and proactive

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson, B. Oswald, M & Adey, K (1993) Discipline in South Australian Primary schools. *Educational Studies*, 19 (3) 289-305. Burke, C. Jarman, K, & Whitmore, L (1994) Disruptive and anti-social behaviour in primary schooling: Foci for professional development and community education, *Journal of Teaching Practice*, 14 (1) 1-16.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Education and Science (1989) *Discipline in Schools*, (The Elton Report), London: HMSO.

strategies to create and maintain a system of order within schools. Reactive strategies refer to actions defined in response to students' misbehaviour. These, essentially, are what were considered in Part 1 of this chapter. Proactive strategies anticipate patterns of behaviour and seek to prevent, minimise and resolve acts of indiscipline.

In a practical world it is not a matter of one type of strategy being chosen over the other. However, schooling in its broadest sense is a preparation for reasoned participation in considerate relationships with others. The more that discipline can be based on consensual observance of shared principles rather than the imposition of rules, the more effective, lasting and satisfying it is likely to be for all members of school communities.

Without denying in any way the practical necessity for reactive strategies such as those considered in earlier sections, the remainder of this chapter will concentrate on showing that with time, patience and planning, some schools have used proactive strategies to attain principled order that is supportive of teaching and learning. Reactive approaches in general see the focus of intervention as being 'inside the person' whereas proactive strategies concentrate their attention on processes 'inside the school'. A major limitation of a school or departmental policy that is over-reliant on reactive measures is that it focuses almost exclusively on the behaviour of the individual student and ignores other factors that contribute to a well-behaved school. An American study of eight schools over a three-year period recognised that an effective strategy to reduce the incidence of misbehaviour involved change at the individual, classroom and school levels<sup>15</sup>. The study was based on the realisation that some individual students are more likely than others to misbehave, some teachers are more likely than others to produce high levels of indiscipline in their classrooms by their teaching and management practices, and some schools more often than others fail to manage student misbehaviour. We can add another level to the analysis and confidently assert that children in some neighbourhoods or communities suffer from more social and economic dislocation and stress than others and are more likely to experience disciplinary problems in schools<sup>16</sup>.

Other researchers have noted the marked variation in rates of suspension, truancy and delinquency between schools that have very similar student profiles<sup>17</sup>. The Inquiry has visited schools where a change of leadership and a concerted effort to develop proactive discipline strategies has 'turned around' the school and dramatically reduced the level of behaviour referrals from classroom teachers to senior staff and the overall rate of suspensions and expulsions. The research indicates that if we are concerned with 'what works' in this difficult area, we need to extend our view of indiscipline from individual behaviour to encompass school, classroom and community processes<sup>18</sup>. We would expect the most effective outcomes to occur when we adopt a multi-level approach to discipline and order within schools. This implies fair and effective ways to manage disruption within classrooms and schools as well as proactive whole school efforts to consider wider

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<sup>15</sup> Gottfredson, D., Gottfredson, C., & Hybl, L., (1993) Managing adolescent behaviour: a multi year, multi school study, *American Educational Research Journal*, 30 (1): 179-215.

<sup>16</sup> In particular, children living in areas of concentrated disadvantage (see Vinson, T., Baldry, E., (1999) *The Spatial Clustering of Child Maltreatment: Are Micro-Social Environments Involved?* Canberra, Australian Institute of Criminology Trends and Issues, June).

<sup>17</sup> Rutter, M., Maughan, B., Mortimore, P. & Ouston, J., (1979) *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and their Effects*, London: Open Books.

<sup>18</sup> Watkins, C. & Wagner, C. (2000) *Improving School Behaviour*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

patterns of which the behaviour is part, and to draw upon appropriate supports in the school and community.

Before considering strategies developed by some NSW schools, the following summary is presented of important general characteristics of a proactive approach to indiscipline in schools that are emphasised in the research literature<sup>19</sup>:

1. *A philosophy of inclusivity*: Proactive schools develop an ethos that expresses a positive regard for young people, a respect for diversity, a genuine interest in youth cultures, a commitment that all children can learn successfully, a special effort to help those who are most vulnerable, and support for teachers in their work with young people<sup>20</sup>.
2. *A professional learning community*: Earlier in this report, the Inquiry stressed the importance of reflective dialogue and collaboration between teachers in the development of productive pedagogies (see Chapter 1). Strong and regular professional collaboration, especially around improved teaching and learning, is also associated with positive relations between students and less student misbehaviour<sup>21</sup>. The Inquiry has visited schools where teams of teachers have worked together to develop integrated learning programs and productive pedagogies (see Chapter 2). In every case, the reflective dialogue and collaboration between teachers has revitalised teaching and re-engaged reluctant learners with positive effects on the rate of misbehaviour.
3. *The school as a community*: Schools that have a strong ethos of communal organisation (developed collegial relations, frequent contacts between teachers and other staff and students, responsiveness to students' need for affiliation and a positive approach to student participation) have higher teacher satisfaction and morale, higher teacher enjoyment of work, lower teacher absenteeism, increased student interest in academic work, lower levels of student absenteeism, and improved student behaviour<sup>22</sup>.
4. *Promoting positive discipline*: Proactive schools focus on positive behaviours and preventive measures rather than punitive actions to improve discipline. In some cases the shift has been associated with conscious whole school efforts to consistently praise and reward acceptable behaviour so that it becomes the norm throughout the school community. In other instances, schools have developed anti-bullying, anti-racist and anti-homophobia programs to alert staff and students to forms of discrimination and violence within the school and wider community. Mentoring, peer mediation and other forms of conflict resolution, have also played a valuable preventive role in an increasing number of schools.

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<sup>19</sup> Wayson, W., de Voss, G., Kaeser, S., Lasley, T. & Pinnel, G. (1982) *Handbook for Developing Schools with Good Discipline*, Bloomington, Indiana, Phi Delta Kappa. McEvoy, A. (2000) Antisocial behaviour, academic failure, and school climate: a critical review, *Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorder*, Fall.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, P. (1999) *Against the Odds: Developing School Programmes that Make a Difference for Students and Families in Communities Placed at Risk*, Thinking About Full Service Schools, No: 4, Sydney: Australian Council for Equity in Education.

<sup>21</sup> School of Education, University of Queensland (2000) *School Reform Longitudinal Study: Final Report*, vol 1, May, Brisbane.

<sup>22</sup> Bryk, A. S., & Driscoll, M. E., (1988) *An Empirical Investigation of the School as a Community*, Chicago: University of Chicago School of Education.

5. *A school organisation that supports student wellbeing:* A proactive school is aware that the way it organises its core functions of learning and teaching can increase or diminish patterns of disruptive behaviour. Features of school organisation that have an influence upon student engagement in learning and rates of misbehaviour include school and class size, assessment regimes, playground spaces and physical amenities, and the school timetable.
6. *Critical reflection and democratic procedures:* A proactive school initiates regular reviews of its curriculum and internal processes and how they can be changed to increase student and staff wellbeing. It frequently surveys the views of students, parents, and teachers, and uses the data to monitor the wellbeing of students and staff and plan future actions. The participation of students in rule making, and the sense of ownership that results, is a valuable training in democratic procedures and participation. Proactive schools are more likely to identify needs and solutions that reflect their own style of operation rather than simply bolting on external 'solutions' for indiscipline in schools.

### **Proactive schools**

In the course of its investigation, the Inquiry has visited a number of schools that have successfully used proactive measures to enhance student and staff wellbeing and minimise the extent of disruptive behaviour. These schools embody many of the qualities of proactive schools described above. Teachers consult with students to identify problems and develop school rules, and work collaboratively to ensure students experience success within a caring and supportive environment. The emphasis is upon choice and responsibility, and the negotiation of process rather than on an inflexible code or set of sanctions. The purpose in this section is to describe some of the strategies used by students and teachers to achieve and sustain a well-behaved school and examine the policy and system supports that might strengthen and extend such practices.

Before examining specific strategies, it is important to restate a point made in Chapter 2 about curriculum, pedagogy and engagement in learning. There is considerable evidence that classroom misbehaviour and disruption are related to the boredom and lack of success that some students experience in learning<sup>23</sup>. The Inquiry has proposed a major reorientation in the Department of Education and Training's Strategic Planning process to elevate the place of pedagogy in schools (recommendation 2.1). This reorientation, along with the recommended increase in resources for teachers to access professional development (recommendation 1.2), should have very positive effects upon student engagement and motivation. It would help to reduce the level of disruption within schools and classrooms.

Returning to more particular strategies, the Inquiry was impressed with insights offered by students attending a NSW Student Representative Council (SRC) meeting in Sydney in May, 2002. They expressed great concern about the poor physical state of their schools, the unattractive wire fences erected to prevent vandalism and intrusion, and the indiscipline that gave public education a bad reputation. Despite these difficulties, the students were clearly proud of their public schools. A wider sense of ownership and pride in their school among students generally, they argued, would reduce the level of indiscipline and damage to school property.

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<sup>23</sup> Woods, P. (1990) *The Happiest Days? How Pupils cope with School*, London, Falmer Press. Lloyd-Smith, M. & Davies, R. (Eds) (1995) *On the Margins: the educational experiences of 'problem pupils'*, Stoke, Trentham.

They regarded genuine student participation as an important vehicle for generating a broader sense of ownership and pride within the student body.

The Inquiry witnessed the valuable role of student participation in changing a school climate when it visited Sir Joseph Banks High School. In an effort to promote positive discipline, the staff and students had developed an imaginative and effective anti-bullying campaign. The Student Representative Council surveyed the students throughout the school about the extent of bullying and, together with the Welfare Team, worked through the issues. In order to create interest in the issue and engage the hearts and minds of their fellow students, the SRC created a range of strategies that evoked fun and enjoyment. Posters appeared mysteriously around the school declaring that 'Anti is coming!' The students prepared a brochure, in comic format, using the slogan, 'Bully Busters'. They created a soft, cuddly mascot (an ant), and a super-hero character (complete with mask, purple and black outfit with orange cape) who appeared in person at the assembly that initiated the campaign. The anti-bullying message was spread in assemblies, in classrooms, in two special issues of the regular school magazine, and in posters around the school. The campaign generated student stories, poetry, drama and testimonies of teachers who recounted incidents when they were bullied during their schooling.

Students reported to the Inquiry that the campaign had transformed the school climate. They claimed that there were more positive interactions in the playground and a greater willingness to seek help from others when incidents of bullying occurred. One student described how she, along with others, had come to realise that bullying involved not only verbal and physical aggression but also the social exclusion of others. They described how the campaign had heightened the unacceptability of bullying and encouraged students to intervene when instances developed and to speak out when they were victimised. Both staff and students agreed that the key to the success of the campaign has been the high level of student involvement and the willingness of staff to listen to their ideas and take them seriously.

The Inquiry has encountered many schools that have mechanically followed the Departmental injunction to develop discipline codes consisting of school rules and a graded series of practices for dealing with unacceptable behaviour that lead eventually to suspension or exclusion from the school community. The existence in the background of a codified system of rules and sanctions may be necessary for formal determinations where a degree of specificity is needed to protect the rights of all parties. However, where day-to-day discipline is effective it more often than not rests upon a clear and defensible set of principles and a few sensible rules presented in positive language. The authority of the principles and rules, and the likelihood that they will shape behaviour, is increased when all groups in the school have shared in their development. In illustrating the application of these principles the inquiry draws heavily upon two examples, Canterbury Boys High School and St Marys Senior High School. It is acknowledged that the last mentioned school has the advantage of being for young adults in the post-compulsory stage of their education but some of the measures adopted are capable of general application.

Canterbury Boys High School is an example of a school that over a number of years has replaced an ineffective coercive discipline regime with a more effective system that relies on negotiation, responsibility and structures of support for teachers and students. A teacher who has lived through the change, described to the Inquiry how the process got underway:

There were meetings held in the school and there was agreement that we were going to have to change the way we operated. We made visits to a number of schools ... I remember we went to Wiley Park Girls and we went to Balmain High. We were particularly interested in the Glasser system there, and we thought we would try and apply it here. It had to be a system with which we were comfortable. It couldn't be 'their' system or anyone else's system. We had to make it our own. So we had a number of meetings, we came up with the Glasser system, and a very strong part of that was 'catch the kids being good'. Reward them for doing the right thing, and have a non-violent approach in language.

The staff began by surveying every student in the school to find out what they thought about school in general, the behaviour in the classroom and playground, and any changes that would improve school life. The consistent message from students, and subsequently from parents, was that they wanted a strong but fair system of school rules. After further consultation, the students came up with a set of rules, expressed in positive language, which became the eight rules governing behaviour throughout the school community, for example, arrive to class on time; enter and leave the class quietly; look after your own, the school's and other people's property; and respect the right of others to work. A similar approach has been observed in other primary and secondary schools. For example, in Bourke Public School students participate in the development of simple but effective rules for each classroom and work area.

St Marys Senior High School has a clear focus upon learning and students sharing in the creation of a mutually supportive and enjoyable learning environment. *Trust* is a word that students invoked in discussion with the Inquiry to describe their relations with one another and with their teachers. The latter were said to be available to assist with study problems at any time that was practicable, within or outside of working hours. Behind the informality that characterises teacher-student relations there has been a considerable investment of time in professional development and the pursuit of productive pedagogy<sup>24</sup>. In the past, when the school was a Year 7-12 high school it had a typical range of discipline problems. More recently the school has been strongly committed to the belief that an educationally engaged student, from whom adult self-management is anticipated, will behave in a responsible manner. This orientation, rather than a more controlling one, has seen a transformation in students' conduct.

At Canterbury Boys High the involvement of students in setting the norms of acceptable everyday behaviour within the school was an essential part of the change process. The draft rules, explained the teacher:

were fed back to the students, explained to them, they had another say, and the result was that they felt they owned the rules. We had a lot of meetings to discuss and explain the rules to the students, and we have done that ever since, at the beginning of the year. If the kids don't own the rules in the first place, or understand how they function, and respect the system, then it's not going to work.

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<sup>24</sup> This concept is discussed in Chapter 2 of the present report, *Curriculum and Pedagogy*.



At St Marys Senior High School the Inquiry caused minor puzzlement by asking to see a copy of the discipline code. When someone retrieved the document - it was about a third of a page in length - instead of codified infractions and penalties it consisted, essentially, of several broad statements of principle. They are as follows:

The aim of the discipline policy is to uphold the ethos of our school and preserve the adult learning environment in which St Marys Senior High School currently operates. To maintain the reputation of their school students are to display respect at all times to both fellow students and staff, and act in a manner which conforms to school expectations. Paramount to the preservation of the school ethos are the honourable values of respect and tolerance. These values are enforced to ensure a safe and harmonious school atmosphere conducive to effective study.

The Student Representative Council formulated the code, a fact that has no doubt contributed to its adoption by students generally. The principal added the comment that "We don't have discipline here. We have choices exercised by students - which we respect - and those choices have consequences. The general question before us is *"How does it happen in the adult world? Why don't we do that?"* Because the students are young adults, there is an effective welfare system in the background, supporting students in their growth and waiting to be used if necessary. Students expressed particular appreciation of a teacher mentor scheme as well as mentor groups, and a range of specialist teacher and human service support staff.

With students and teachers moving in and out of the school, the process of building ownership and commitment to the norms of good behaviour must be ongoing. At Canterbury Boys, new students and new teachers are systematically in-serviced into the rules and how the system of discipline operates. Every couple of years, the survey of student perceptions and opinions is repeated and the data analysed to see whether changes are necessary. The result of this consultative process, as the principal noted to the Inquiry, is that discipline is no longer embedded in a 'them' and 'us' atmosphere of confrontation:

The change has been very powerful for the deputy and me, especially when we have to deal with those few students who are referred to us. 'We all know the rules' I say, 'I can't change the rules, even though I am the principal of the school. We all agreed these are going to be the rules.' And they really have no come back, because they realise they are the community's rules. We find that empowering, too, because it doesn't mean that we have to be both judge and jury. They know that actions have consequences, whether they are positive or negative.

When researchers have sought the views of disruptive and misbehaving students about effective discipline, three features seem to be central: that it is fair, that it is delivered in a respectful manner, and that it is seen to be motivated by a concern for the wellbeing of the students<sup>25</sup>. At Canterbury Boys High School, these qualities are reflected in the negotiation that takes place between students who break the rules and their classroom teacher. After talking through the behaviour in relation to the rules, the student and teacher agree on an individual plan for the student to work on in relation to their behaviour so as to minimise future infringements. The negotiation focuses not only on what the students must do, but also on what the teacher can do to support the student in keeping to the plan. Canterbury Boys' practices in this

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<sup>25</sup> Pomroy, E., (1999) The teacher-student relationship in secondary school: insights from excluded students, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol 20, no. 4, pp 465-482.

regard resonate with the steps taken in some other schools, at the point when a behavioural problem has resulted in a student taking 'time out'. Both Bourke Primary and Castle Hill High School, for example, work with such students to develop a plan for successfully restoring them to their classes by improving their behaviour. At Canterbury Boys, if the student has worked through three such plans, and the behaviour persists, it is referred to the head teacher as a more serious matter. Generally, however, as a teacher explained, the system encourages classroom teachers to take responsibility for negotiating behaviour at the classroom level:

A lot of things that could become major issues don't, because they are solved at the classroom level ... The students know how it operates and they think it's fair. Coupled with the negotiation aspect is a reward system. We try to praise them whenever possible, and give out merit certificates. Once they get a certain number they see the head teacher or year adviser and get a higher level of reward or certificate. The students love that. It's certainly not: 'You broke that rule, do this!' It's a matter of working things out with the teacher, and sometimes a parent, to negotiate an outcome. Yes, it's time consuming. But the long-term benefits are worth it. I would find it difficult to work in a system that didn't operate this way. If you spoke to a lot of teachers in this school they would feel the same.

Embedded within this whole school approach to discipline are various specific programs that sustain a sense of safety and wellbeing within the school community. Each year, the Year 7 students are taken out of classes for a day for a range of special activities focusing on anti-racism and anti-bullying. These same concerns are built into the curriculum throughout the school to cover various aspects of discrimination, such as disability, sexism and homophobia. The unacceptability of discrimination is discussed and the process for dealing with it within the school is made clear to the students.

In addition, various mentoring programs are used to support young people who are disengaged from school. One such group is made up of Pacific Island boys who figured disproportionately in rates of suspension, non-attendance, and classroom misbehaviour. The school draws on school and District resources to employ a Pacific Island ex-student to mentor the boys and assist them with their literacy needs and study skills. The program has a strong cultural component. Overall, the scheme has been enriching for the school as well as strengthening the boys' attachment to learning and minimising incidents of misbehaviour. In similar fashion, a mentor scheme for Cleveland Street High School students who are soon to leave school or judged to be 'at risk,' has not only supported individual students but also given a practical focus to the pastoral care program and been an integrating force within the school.

A second mentoring program at Canterbury Boys involves Year 7 students who are selected to be mentors to the incoming new intake of Year 6 students (see Chapter 2). An interesting aspect of this program is that a proportion of the mentors are selected, not because they are the compliant, elite students within the cohort but because they are on individual plans for misbehaviour or returning from suspension. This has the effect of not only deepening the attachment of the students to the school and its values, but also of reintegrating offending students

back into the moral community of the school<sup>26</sup>. For precisely the same reasons, Eagle Vale High School in South Western Sydney uses offending students who have 'turned the corner' as a positive influence on students whom it believes can be prevented from making the same errors.

Finally, an intensive mentoring program at Canterbury Boys High School works with students who come back from suspension. They work with a staff member who has trained as a mentor and been given a time allocation to do the job. They meet and talk through the reasons that led to the suspension, come up with ideas about how such behaviour can be prevented, and how the school can support the student to adapt back into school life. The staff member has described her work to the Inquiry:

The first thing I do in a session, if they have just come back from suspension, is to talk about why they were suspended, the issue that gave rise to it, their choices. We then set a goal - maybe a short-term goal, like not to get suspended or a longer-term goal, like making it through to the end of the year. Then we might design a behaviour sheet, where you tick a box if the student gets into trouble for particular behaviours. It's voluntary and they take it around to their classes and get teachers to sign it. Currently I have been talking with a boy about his behaviour in class and he says that he doesn't ask any questions. So we set a task where he has to ask ten good questions during the week, and teachers sign off on it. When he reaches that goal he gets a merit certificate and we can concentrate on other behaviours. So that's what we do - look at the behaviours, set goals and look at the choices they make from week to week. They always have something to work towards.

Canterbury Boys High School has developed a whole school approach to discipline where offenders are held accountable for their misbehaviour within a community of support, an idea that in recent years has come to be associated with restorative justice. Instead of stigmatising and excluding an offending student from the school community, the aim of restorative justice is to acknowledge the harm done by the behaviour to self and others, and to 'make things right' through appropriate reparation and strengthened relationships. Instead of isolating the very students who are in greatest need of social supports and education, the aim is to reintegrate the offender back into the school community. In Queensland, trained teacher-facilitators used restorative justice principles to deal with incidents covering assaults, victimisation, property damage and theft in a program that covered 119 schools<sup>27</sup>. The evaluation revealed very high levels of participant satisfaction with the procedures, the emotional support and the substantive outcomes, a greater sense of justice, higher levels of social support for those affected and reduced levels of re-offending. In Canberra, an anti-bullying program (Responsible Citizenship), based on restorative justice principles, has been trialed and evaluated in a primary school context<sup>28</sup>. The evaluation indicated that the children developed skills for working

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<sup>26</sup> A focus on accountability and reintegration rather than exclusion and punishment is central in the notion of restorative justice. An example of its application to school discipline is described in: Morrison, B (2002) Bullying and victimisation in schools: A restorative justice approach, Australian Institute of Criminology, *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 219, Canberra ACT.

<sup>27</sup> Cameron, L. & Thorsborne, M. (2001) Restorative justice and school discipline: Mutually exclusive? In Braithwaite, J. & Strang, H. (eds.), *Restorative Justice and Civil Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 180-194

<sup>28</sup> Morrison, B (2002) Bullying and victimisation in schools: A restorative justice approach, Australian Institute of Criminology, *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 219, Canberra ACT.

through differences and generally exhibited behaviour strategies that were less characteristic of either victims or bullies.

The purpose of this section has been to describe some of the strategies used by students and teachers to achieve and sustain a well-behaved school. While much of this chapter has necessarily focused upon the responses of the DET to manage the relatively small number of students who are persistently disruptive in school, the Inquiry is also keen to foster processes within schools that reduce the incidence of disruption and anti-social behaviour and lessen the stress on teachers. The challenge is to develop policy and system support for schools wishing to move from an over-reliance on punishment and control to more effective forms of compliance that reflect the principles and practices discussed above.

There is no shortage of good models and ideas to achieve this outcome. The schools described in this section are but a sample of schools that have developed effective proactive policies and practices to maximise student and staff wellbeing and minimise disruption and misbehaviour. In addition, schools can draw upon a range of resources (anti-bullying, anti-racism, mentoring, peer mediation, child protection) produced by the Student Welfare and Behaviour units within the DET, and also access specialist advice from the Student Welfare and Behaviour consultants based in the District Offices. Recent interest in health promoting schools<sup>29</sup> and the mental health of young people<sup>30</sup> has also generated a range of valuable ideas, resources and programs that can support schools to develop effective proactive discipline and student welfare programs.

The *Mindmatters*<sup>31</sup> program, developed by the Commonwealth as part of its national mental health strategy, is one such resource. This program, which consists of a comprehensive set of text and multi-media resources and a professional development program, aims to promote and protect the social and emotional wellbeing of students and teachers by fostering a school environment in which people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful. The health promoting school model adopted by *Mindmatters*, places student wellbeing at the centre of change that embraces curriculum and teaching, the school ethos and environment, and community partnerships and services.

While *Mindmatters* offers schools a rich compendium of information, practical ideas and activities, it has less to say about the *process* of organisational change. One of the strengths of the *Gatehouse Project*, developed by a team from the Centre for Adolescent Health at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, is that it fills this gap. As with *Mindmatters*, the *Project's* primary aim is to increase the capacities of school communities to address the emotional and mental health needs of students. Although this particular project has been instigated by health workers, similar procedures could just as easily have been part of exercises led by applied social scientists, social workers, community developers and other involved in strengthening human communities. Since beginning in 1997, the Gatehouse project team has worked with 12 schools and monitored developments in 14 control schools. Its special contribution, as far as proactive discipline is concerned, is that it has developed a collaborative change process for schools to work through to increase

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<sup>29</sup> World Health Organisation (1995) *The Health Promoting School – a Framework for Action in the WHO Western Pacific Region*, Regional Office for the Western Pacific.

<sup>30</sup> Moon, I., Meyer, P. & Grau, J (1999) *Australia's Young People: Their Health and Wellbeing*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

<sup>31</sup> Details of the program and the text and multi media components can be found on the *Mindmatters* website. <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters>

connectedness to the school and engagement with learning. The key features of the process are:

- *Problem setting and problem solving capacity:* A member of the Gatehouse team works as a 'critical friend' with teachers, and students to conduct a student survey about peer relations, student-teacher relations, and attitudes to learning and discipline. The 'critical friend' works with the staff and students to analyse the data, identify risk and protective factors within the school environment, and reflect on aspects of the school organisation that bear on student and staff wellbeing. The aim is to come up with strategies to strengthen a sense of security and trust, enhance opportunities for good communications and build a sense of positive regard through valued participation in aspects of school life.
- *Changing school structures:* Student welfare, pastoral care or student management teams are typically preoccupied with crisis management around discipline. Recognising this limitation, the *Gatehouse Project* developed the idea of a broad based and representative whole-school adolescent well-being team to coordinate change within each participating school. It contains the principal or deputy principal, the student welfare teacher, sub-school leaders, curriculum leaders, students' representatives, parent representatives, and a community worker. This change reflects the whole-school approach and encourages a broad attitudinal shift within the school community. Patterns within the survey data of alienation, isolation, boredom, failure and lack of involvement come to be seen, not simply as properties of individuals, but as indicators of a lack of connectedness to school and disengagement from learning. Some starting points for school change arising from this process are: preventive strategies in regard to bullying; peer mediation and leadership programs; more challenging curriculum; teacher and student work teams; and increased opportunities for student participation in decision making.
- *Access, use and enhanced networks of support:* Earlier in this chapter it was pointed out that actions to enhance student wellbeing and good discipline are more likely to be effective if they work across the boundary between school and community. There is no shortage of support agencies outside the school (curriculum, professional, speakers, programs, social services and the like) but the problem is to access such support systematically in accordance with schools needs and priorities. In the *Gateway Project*, the 'critical friend' acts as the link between the adolescent well-being team and targeted external support.

As this section has indicated, there are examples of good practice that can be used as a basis for wider change. The difficulty from a system point of view seems to be a lack of strategic focus and leadership rather than a shortage of ideas and resources. The challenge is to develop a coherent strategy that can bring these elements together to support a process of democratic whole-school change. Some of the important ingredients in this process have been discussed above: a school audit of relationships and other aspects of student and staff wellbeing; student wellbeing and behaviour considered within a broad educational context; students held accountable for their misbehaviour within a community of support; student participation as a basis for ownership of the rules; an emphasis upon choice and responsibility for one's actions; an external 'critical friend' to support change and liaise with other agencies; collaboration between all stakeholders; and a focus upon reviewing change to see what works. The Inquiry believes that there is an urgent need for the DET to play a more active and strategic role in assisting schools to

develop effective proactive school practices that will minimise the incidence of indiscipline in schools.

With this end in mind, the Inquiry urges the DET to invite selected schools with high rates of student misbehaviour and disengagement from learning, to participate in a *Positive Discipline and Student Wellbeing Project*. The aim of the *Project* will be to minimise the level of disruption and misbehaviour by fostering whole-school, proactive approaches to school discipline and student wellbeing. The *Project* will reflect a model of whole-school change that embodies collaboration between teachers, students, and parents; a diversity of responses that are sensitive to local circumstances; an appreciation of best practice that is currently on offer; and a focus on intellectual and emotional wellbeing as a prerequisite to engaged learning and an ordered school environment.

Approximately forty-five participating schools should be drawn from Districts within Bands 3 and 4 according to the Index of Need used to allocate behaviour resources to Districts throughout New South Wales and be part of the *Project* for three years. Schools within the project should be organised into clusters, on the basis of locality, and support provided for each cluster to work with an external facilitator or 'critical friend.' The facilitator would assist with the process of reflection and analysis and liaise between the schools and relevant external services. Appropriate professional development would need to be aligned with the plans for school change and provided on an individual school and cluster basis. Participating schools would be required to develop and monitor appropriate indicators of indiscipline and misbehaviour and conduct systematic audits of student and staff wellbeing.

The Student Services and Equity Programs division of the DET should have overall responsibility for the *Positive Discipline and Student Wellbeing Project*. District superintendents should facilitate the formation of clusters of participating schools and Student Welfare and Behaviour consultants within the Districts should offer support to the process. *Project* schools will be required to form a school-wide *Positive Discipline and Student Wellbeing Team* to plan and monitor the project. The Team should include the principal or deputy principal, teachers with responsibility for the curriculum and student welfare, students' representatives, parent representatives, and an appropriate community member (for example, applied social scientist, social worker, youth or community development worker). The DET will maintain a *Positive Discipline and Student Wellbeing* website (via the proposed *Pedagogy Clearing House*) and all participating schools will disseminate information about the process and results of change within their schools via the website.

The total cost of the *Project*, over three years, would be approximately \$2,060,000. Of this amount, \$1,100,000 would go to the participating schools to employ the external facilitators and pay for casual relief to allow the school management team to meet on a regular basis. An additional sum of \$40,000 will go to each of the eight Districts (\$960,000 in total) to support specific change strategies resulting from individual school audits and to allow the schools within the cluster to meet and share ideas. It is assumed that school-based professional development activities will be resourced from the increased Professional Development Fund, recommended in Chapter One of the Inquiry's report, and that the management of the *Project* at the District level will be covered by existing resources.

**Recommendation 5.7:**

That the DET develop a *Positive Discipline and Student Wellbeing Project* to assist schools with high rates of student misbehaviour and disengagement from learning to develop and monitor school-wide, proactive approaches to discipline and student wellbeing.

**Estimated total cost ... \$2,060,000**