

SCHOOLS — VIOLENCE

490. Ms M.M. QUIRK to the Minister for Education:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to ensuring that schools across Western Australia are equipped to manage the risk of violence.

Can the minister update the house on how this government is assisting WA schools to manage violence and ensure that all staff and students are protected from violent behaviour?

Dr A.D. BUTI replied:

I thank the member for her question and her interest in all things educational. As we know, violence, aggression and bullying do unfortunately take place at our schools, and it is of course completely unacceptable. Every parent has a right to send their child to school and expect they will be in a safe, nurturing and supportive environment, and every staff member should feel safe in their workplace. Recently, we announced that at the commencement of term 3 our government would stand strongly behind our staff in protecting staff and students against violence when we announced *Standing together against violence*, an updated plan to strengthen support for schools to protect all students and school staff from violent behaviour. It includes new connect and respect resources that were developed to reinforce and clearly outline the expectations for schools, parents and carers to keep our schools safe and to continue to work together in the best interests of our students.

We have also empowered principals to use existing laws and policy measures against those who behave in a threatening, intimidating or physically violent manner towards staff or students. This includes offences that are communicated both in person and online. To protect our students and staff we will support our principles in excluding aggressive people from the school site. This support includes a dedicated email and phone line service available to principals to provide advice on how to manage the escalating process, assistance on issuing prohibition orders and on obtaining legal advice. We are also building on existing measures. Previously, students who chose to film fight content were suspended. We will now also suspend students who choose to share fight content on social media even if they did not take the film. We continue to work with principals and staff to ensure that we can have a school system that is as safe as possible.

When we made this announcement, we received support from across the sector, and I would like to tell the house about some of those responses. Matt Jarman, the president of the State School Teachers' Union of WA, said —

“The first impact our school leaders and teachers will feel is confidence that they will now have unwavering support ... to prohibit a parent or to automatically suspend, or even necessarily exclude a student,” ...

Melissa Gillett, Secondary School Executive Association president, said —

“The vast majority of parents work in partnership really well with schools, but on those occasions it doesn't, it's nice for principals to know they've got the backing of the system to take the steps they need to take.

Niel Smith, WA Primary Principals' Association president, said —

... members would welcome the clearer guidelines on social media abuse that would eliminate grey areas and save principals' time.

By working together to keep our schools safe for learning, school staff can now focus on what they are there for, which is to teach students and ensure they are provided with every opportunity possible to reach their potential. I conclude by saying that I, as Minister for Education, and the Cook Labor government have the principals' backs.