



TASSO SUBMISSION
to
Commission of Inquiry Recommendations
Scrutiny Committee

***We're in this together.
We speak as a proud voice for families within the
Tasmanian State School community to
make sure their needs and ideas are heard.***

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations pays respect to the Palawa people as the Traditional Custodians and first educators of the land in beautiful Lutruwita, Tasmania.

We pay respect to elders past, present, and emerging and acknowledge their deep connection to country.

We also express our gratitude that we share this land today, our sorrow for some of the costs of that sharing, and our hope and belief that we move to a place of equity, justice, and partnership together.

Acknowledging Parents

TASSO acknowledges parents and caregivers as the first educators in their child's life. We celebrate and honour the diversity of families and recognise the vital role family and community play in supporting children and young people throughout their learning journeys.

TASSO prepared this submission with consideration of feedback provided by Tasmanian parents and caregivers. We extend our appreciation to all who have shared their experiences with us.

Background

Who is TASSO?

The Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations (TASSO) is the peak body representing the parents and community who form the School Association within Tasmanian government schools.

We represent the School Associations of all government schools in Tasmania.

Our work includes providing essential training, resources, and support to school association committees. Most importantly, we help them meet their constitutional requirements, support office-bearers in their roles, facilitate valuable networking opportunities, and advocating for government education. Together School Associations can do great things.

At TASSO, we believe in the value of government education. We are committed to making sure that state school education in Tasmania delivers the best possible education for all our Tassie kids. We speak as a proud voice for families to make sure their needs and ideas are heard.

Contact:

Jessica Bennett

Operations Manager

manager@tasso.org.au

Introduction

We acknowledge the dark history of sexual harm in Tasmanian institutions and commend the government's commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings. These recommendations are vital for protecting all children and breaking the culture of silence.

Our focus is on discussing the implementation of these recommendations within the education arm of the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP). We do not claim expertise in youth justice, out-of-home care, or youth detention.

Every child has the right to live free from sexual harm. Every adult has a duty to report concerns. See something, say something.

Recommendation 6.2.1 – Safeguarding Risk Management Plan

TASSO, through its work with School Associations, has seen and heard concerns regarding the development of Safeguarding Risk Management Plans (RMPs) in schools.

Many plans have been developed by safeguarding leads with little involvement from the broader school community, including School Association Committees. This raises concerns about the level of understanding and awareness within the school community of safeguarding plans. Safeguarding Leads, to our knowledge, have not been provided with formal training to develop RMPs, only professional development delivered in-house.

We have seen plans that are not student-focused, with the underlying premise appearing to prioritise the protection of the establishment. Some plans downplay the risks of student-on-student abuse, with control measures that lack an educational focus and provide limited avenues for students to report concerns beyond telling a teacher. There is often no consideration for risks that are outside of the school environment that filter into the school environment when students are at school.

In some cases, mitigation measures effectively restrict family involvement and engagement with learning at school and in the classroom.

The Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) card is often referred to as a control measure. While this is suggested as safeguard for individuals charged with a crime, it has flaws. Currently, there is no standard linkage within departments or systems, and there is a reliance on individuals self-reporting. Cross-linking departments to ensure that charges and/or convictions automatically update a person's registration to work with vulnerable people would improve this safeguard. Using a cross-sector approach to mandatory reporting would ensure that an individual's card is revoked, and organisations are notified immediately. There also needs to be the acknowledgement that this WWVP control measure, only highlights those with conviction; it does not capture those who are potential risks to our children, with no conviction or cause for concern.

Mandatory Reporting training for volunteers is also frequently used as a control measure. However, this training is not designed to prevent harm—it focuses on recognising and reporting concerns about a child's welfare under the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act (2023)*.

There are inconsistencies in volunteer induction procedures across Tasmanian schools. As a risk control, a standardised and structured induction process would likely be more effective than simply requiring volunteers to watch a Mandatory Reporting training video.

The reviewed Risk Management Plans (RMPs) lack a detailed consequence table, which is essential for outlining the severity of potential risks. Additionally, they do not differentiate between untreated risk (the level of risk before any controls are applied) and treated or residual risk (the level of risk remaining after mitigation measures). This omission makes it difficult to assess how effectively risks are being managed. Furthermore, there is no evaluation of control effectiveness, meaning there is no clear understanding of whether the measures in place are sufficient to reduce risk or if additional actions are needed. Without these critical components, the RMPs fail to provide a comprehensive risk assessment, potentially leaving gaps in safeguarding measures.

A critical omission in these plans is the lack of consideration for the risks to individual students if abuse occurs within the school environment. The physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of abuse must be clearly identified, alongside targeted mitigation measures. Schools should include proactive strategies such as trauma-informed response protocols, confidential and accessible reporting mechanisms for students, and immediate support structures, including access to school psychologists and external support services. Without explicit recognition of these risks and concrete mitigation strategies, schools may fail to adequately protect and support students who experience harm.

Potential unintended consequences of risk management plans have been noted by School Association Committee members:

- A general fear of risk
- No support of fundraising events
- Disbanding of parent help programs
- A reduction of excursions
- School camps no longer taking place
- Impacts on external service providers no longer having access to facilities to work with children within the school

Decreasing opportunities for parents and the school community to participate in the school may result in easier safeguarding, but it is to the detriment of education, engagement, and community.

Further considerations:

- External assessment of understanding and implementation of Safeguarding Risk Management Plans
- A simple, consistent and accessible volunteer training/induction program implemented across all schools
- Development of a standardised consequence table within all RMPs to assess potential risks, including differentiation between untreated and treated/residual risk

- Inclusion of a student-focused risk assessment outlining the potential impacts of abuse within a school setting and the corresponding mitigation strategies
- Improved cross-sector collaboration to ensure that Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) registrations are automatically updated based on charges and/or convictions
- A review of barriers created by risk management plans that may inadvertently reduce family and community engagement with schools
- Establishment of trauma-informed response protocols within schools to support students impacted by abuse

Recommendation 6.3.1 – Policy

- **Communication of Child Sexual Abuse Policy** – We are unaware of this policy’s existence; if it does exist, it is not public. There is mention of a communication strategy in the Safeguarding Framework, but the strategy is not public.
- **Mandatory Reporting Policy** – Not publicly available.
- **Mandatory Reporting Procedure** – Publicly available, but volunteers cannot access all embedded links.
 - There appears to be a separation between staff and volunteers, despite the definition stating that "staff" includes both paid employees and volunteers.
 - Sections 5 to 7 reference staff-only documents, even though the procedure defines "staff" as including volunteers, volunteers are unable to access the documents.
 - The review date for the Mandatory Reporting Procedure was September 2023.

Further consideration:

We recommend ensuring consistency in language, so that "staff" aligns with the given definition across all related documents.

- **Professional Conduct Policy** – Concerns outlined below.
- **Risk Management Policy** – Publicly available.
 - This policy applies to volunteers as "workers," yet they are not given access to supporting information, tools, or related policies and procedures.

As the peak parent organisation representing School Associations, we are unaware of any additional safeguarding policies.

We were also not made aware of the Professional Conduct Policy until late January 2025, nor were we asked for input on behalf of parents.

Recommendation 6.4.c – Professional Conduct Policy

As discussed under **Recommendation 6.3 – Policy**, there is a recurring issue in DECYP policies where "staff" and "workers" are defined as both employees and volunteers, yet access to relevant information and resources is restricted to employees. While this policy makes some effort to clarify which sections apply only to employees, several key concerns remain:

- The Professional Conduct Policy is not widely known of or understood by volunteers. Although it is available on the DECYP website, it is categorised under HR policies. Most volunteers do not consider themselves "workers" and are unlikely to look there for policies relevant to them. Often, volunteers refer to themselves as “help or parent help” to the school – this connection needs to be clear.
- Many links within the Policy Scope are inaccessible to the public. Notably, volunteers cannot access the *General Conduct and Behaviour Standard for all workers* or the *Conduct Standard for workers in College/School and Child and Family Learning Centre settings*.
- Volunteer inductions and processes are inconsistent across Tasmanian schools. It is common for parent volunteers to enter a classroom after only presenting their WWVP card and a Mandatory Reporting training certificate, with no additional guidance. There is no clear directive on who is responsible for managing volunteers with a school.
- Under Roles and Responsibilities and Related Procedures, we recommend including the *Respectful School Visitor and Volunteer Behaviour Procedure*. This document is far more relevant to volunteers than the current reference to the State Service Principles and Code of Conduct, as the *State Service Act 2000* does not apply to volunteers.

To our knowledge, there are currently no compliance measures to ensure awareness of this policy within schools among volunteers.

Recommendation 6.5.1 – Mandatory reporting training for Volunteers

While we wholeheartedly support the mandatory reporting requirements for volunteers in classroom settings, TASSO expresses concerns regarding volunteers participating in large volunteer-run events held on school premises, such as fairs, fetes, movie nights, and similar community events. There is a need to balance safeguarding measures with parent engagement and involvement.

The logistics of mandatory reporting training for all volunteers at large events pose challenges. These events often rely on a significant number of volunteers, including parents and the broader community. It is crucial to maintain a healthy level of community and intergenerational involvement in school activities, as these events play a vital role in fundraising and fostering a sense of belonging and community connection.

Mandating mandatory reporting training has inadvertently deterred volunteers by creating a barrier to volunteering, resulting in a shortage of human resources essential to the running events. Resulting in some school community events becoming unviable.

We recommend conducting a risk assessment for community-focused activities. If an event is attended by large numbers of the community, with students primarily accompanied by family members, the requirement for volunteers to hold a WWVP card and a mandatory reporting training certificate seems excessive.

The current approach means that a volunteer parking cars or turning a sausage on a barbeque is required to complete mandatory reporting training, even though the likelihood of a child reporting to them is minimal. Creating a system that does not deter volunteer participation is essential to sustaining school-based community events.

To be clear, mandatory reporting training for volunteers in classrooms or on excursions is essential to ensure they are skilled in recognising, responding to, and reporting concerns of child abuse to the Advice and Referral Line (ARL).

Regarding the current mandatory reporting training video, we urge consideration of a module specific to volunteers in schools that encapsulates all aspects of volunteering.

The current training video lacks simplicity, clear messaging, and education on identifying signs of abuse. It is disjointed and does not require any demonstrated understanding upon completion.

TASSO recommends:

- Creating a dedicated volunteer resource/induction.
- Developing a training video that clearly outlines:
 - Emergency protocols.
 - Volunteer responsibilities.
 - Mandatory reporting obligations.
 - Who can provide support within the school.

The video should also clearly state that volunteers are legally required to report concerns directly to the ARL and cannot delegate this responsibility, though they can be supported in making the call.

An example: Volunteers in a Classroom

Parent A volunteers for parent help in their student's primary school.

They have a valid working with vulnerable people card and have watched the mandatory reporting training video.

They enter the classroom and follow the instruction of the teacher for the classroom activity.

They have not been informed of what to do if there is an emergency. They have had no basic induction into the school. There is no screening of understanding of the signs of abuse in minors. No support structures to ensure that volunteers know who they can raise concerns to, who can support them to make a call to the *Advice and Referral Line*. It's unlikely that they know who the safeguarding lead is at their school. Volunteers are not

aware that they are considered workers in a school setting and the *Conduct and Behaviour Policy* applies to them.

While the current approach ticks the boxes of compliance, it's an approach that is minimalist and doesn't extend far enough to ensure that volunteers are educated and supported.

Recommendation 6.7.2.c. – Communication with families

We acknowledge the delicate balance between legally disclosing information to families and protecting an individual's right to anonymity. However, there is also a need to ensure that families are informed and do not feel that schools or the department are intentionally withholding information about individuals charged with crimes against children.

Recently, an individual was arrested and charged with allegedly possessing or controlling child abuse material. Students from a Northern State School saw their former student teacher on the news and mentioned it to their parents. Parents were rightly concerned. However, it took more than three weeks for communication to be sent to families.

There appeared to be no communication strategy in place for notifying families in cases where a former educator is charged with offenses against children. Parents felt that a deliberate decision was made to withhold information, creating an atmosphere of secrecy and mistrust.

Since the communication strategy is not public, we cannot comment on its effectiveness.

Further consideration needs to be given to:

- Creating clear response timelines for DECYP to communicate with families should allegation arise.
- Families should receive general updates on safeguarding reforms to continue to build trust.

Additional Recommendations from the *Independent Inquiry into the Tasmanian Department of Education's Response to Child Sexual Abuse* that we haven't covered above

Recommendation 3: Embedding Prevention

Through extensive consultation with families during TASSO's submission to the Inquiry into Discrimination and Bullying in Tasmanian Schools it was evident that there is work to be done to safeguard student from harm from other students.

Recommendation 16: Response Protocols

Student agency in reporting crimes against themselves or their peers is essential. TASSO is concerned that many students lack a safe, supported, and effective way to raise their voices.

Existing resources such as *Tell Someone* and *Kids Helpline* provide some avenues for disclosure, but they require awareness, literacy, and confidence to access. Data from the Student Wellbeing and Engagement Survey (SWES) indicates that many students do not have a trusted educator to confide in at school.

There is a glaring absence of a simple, safe, accessible, and anonymous mechanism for students to report concerns both within the school setting and regarding harm outside of school.

A concerted effort is needed to enhance student agency in reporting concerns in ways that work for them. While this inquiry focuses on sexual harm, the ability to flag other forms of antisocial behaviour is equally critical for safeguarding children and supporting their mental health.

Recommendation 20: Complaints handling

The DECYP complaints management processes are in dire need of evaluation and change. The current system is unusable by many families. Alongside, complaints management there should be a review of centralised record keeping. To truly understand the impacts of bullying and harassment in schools we need to centralise record keeping of incidences and processes¹.

On the Implementation of Commission of Inquiry Recommendations Generally

A shared approach

There was a missed opportunity for governmental departments to work together to create resources and training materials for staff and volunteers across all sectors that have contact with children. A shared approach would have potentially streamlined and strengthened the delivery of training resources. A shared approach to recording completion of training across sector would have allowed for volunteers (our focus) to have credit for training received in other sectors either as a staff or volunteer.

Community Sporting Organisations

When an organisation is providing weekend sport to school communities entering a school team, who is responsible for ensuring that there is compliance with the safeguarding measures. The lack of compliance with the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act (2023)* is notable.

Volunteer professional development

As discussed through our report volunteer professional development is limited to mandatory reporting training. Providing opportunities through schools creates a follow-on effect in the community. From our experience volunteers in the school community are volunteering in sporting

¹ <https://www.tasso.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Submission-Inquiry-into-discrimination-and-bullying-in-Tasmanian-Schools-TASSO-2024.pdf>

clubs, service clubs and generally in the community. Cultural change can be accelerated if education in school volunteer communities is done well.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Commission of Inquiry recommendations is a critical step toward protecting children in Tasmanian schools. While progress has been made, significant gaps remain in risk management, safeguarding policies, and volunteer training and support. Addressing these gaps requires a collaborative approach that ensures school communities, including parents and School Association Committees, are actively engaged in safeguarding efforts.

Parent engagement is not just beneficial—it is a safeguard in itself.

More parent involvement means more eyes, more awareness, and stronger support networks for students. When families are welcomed into schools, they enhance protective factors, create additional layers of accountability, and contribute to a culture where children feel safe to speak up. Risk management strategies must acknowledge that excessive restrictions on parent participation can unintentionally weaken safeguarding by reducing community oversight and involvement.

Further work is needed to refine the delivery of these recommendations, ensuring policies are clear, accessible, and practical for all involved. This includes:

- **Developing standardised risk assessments** that prioritise student safety over institutional protection.
- **Enhancing cross-sector collaboration** to strengthen safeguards such as Working with Vulnerable People registrations.
- **Improving volunteer training and induction** to ensure consistency and better prepare community members for their responsibilities.
- **Creating clearer communication protocols** to build trust between schools, families, and the department.

The protection of children is a shared responsibility. To be truly effective, safeguarding must go beyond compliance and be embedded in the culture of every school. This can only happen when families, educators, and policymakers work together to create a system that is transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of students.

TASSO remains committed to advocating for these necessary improvements and ensuring that parent voices continue to shape a safer future for our children and Tasmanian schools.