3.1.3 Student Behaviour

The core business of the Department is providing quality learning for all students in a safe environment. Effective strategies for the management of student behaviour and the maintenance of a safe working and learning environment include OHS procedures, student welfare procedures, curriculum and environmental management. These require balancing the needs of students with disruptive or challenging behaviours with the learning needs of other students.

The majority of unacceptable behaviours encountered can be managed within the context of Student Welfare and Discipline policies. The Department has developed specific policies to address student behaviour including:

Student Discipline in Government Schools (PD/2006/0316/V02)

Anti-bullying plan for schools

Student Welfare Policy (PD/2005/0052)

Student Discipline Policy – TAFE NSW (PD/2002/0075)

Strategies for Safer Schools 1995, Training and Development Directorate, NSW Department of School Education

A fuller list of policies and resources for schools and TAFE Institutes are available on the DET website, from institute managers and the regional student services support team.

Challenging and disruptive behaviours

Challenging behaviour refers to the actions of individual students with disabilities whose behaviours pose a challenge to effective teaching and learning. These behaviours are associated with an intellectual disability, behavioural disorder and psychiatric or physiological disturbance. They are challenging in the sense that they demand from teachers and support staff a high level of knowledge, understanding and skill.

Disruptive behaviour refers to the actions of individual students whose behaviour interferes with their learning and disrupts the learning of others. These behaviours will be of high intensity, frequency and duration.

Strategies for managing challenging and disruptive behaviour are discussed in the following sections.

Behaviour support plans

Some students require specialist assistance in order to ensure they are able to learn effectively and safely. In addition to local student welfare and discipline policies, some student behaviour will require the development of behaviour support plans to identify strategies that will support the student in modifying those behaviours.

Behaviour support plans should be regularly reviewed, including after an incident of inappropriate behaviour. Strategies for Safer Schools provides guidance in developing behaviour support plans.

Risk management of student behaviour

When behaviour is identified as a potential risk to the health and safety of the student, other students or staff, further steps will be required to assess the risk and implement strategies to modify or replace the behaviour.

Risks associated with aggressive or harmful behaviours can be physical or psychological. They may include verbal and physical assault, harassment, threats and intimidation, bullying, physical harm, property damage, chronic exposure to low level aggression, impact from major incidents and the cumulative effect of these behaviours.

A systematic and documented approach to risk management in the delivery of educational programs will assist schools to develop appropriate individual student plans. These plans address student needs within the learning environment and eliminate or control risks to students and staff.

The risk management process can be applied to an individual student's behaviour, the behaviour of a group of students or the entire workplace where a risk impacts broadly for example bullying and harassment.

Risks may be identified prior to enrolment, following a suspension or following an incident. They may also be identified when factors change in the learning or home environment, during changes of activities or at particular times of the day.

The use of current and relevant information to inform the risk assessment process is an essential part of risk management planning. Current and relevant information must be shared with staff to ensure health and safety. For further information on the collection, use and disclosure of information about students with a history of violence refer to Legal Issues Bulletin No. 28, on the DET Legal Services webpage.

Staff and other stakeholders, where relevant, such as parents, carers, counsellors, treating professionals and external agencies (eg Department of Community Services) should be consulted during the risk management process.

Risk assessment and management support tools for student behaviour including step by step guidance material, behaviour observation sheets, a staff survey and risk management planning proformas and samples are located on the OHS webpage, Risk Management, Student Behaviour.

Where the management of unsafe behaviour is identified as requiring additional expertise beyond the capacity of the school or TAFE Institute, access to specialist advice and support services should be sought. For specific information on the support services available, TAFE employees should contact their Institute manager or webpage and schools should contact their regional student support services personnel.

Support for Schools

For schools, a Student Behaviour Support plan process has been developed offering different levels of support to schools.

The process begins at the local level where schools implement a systematic approach to assessing and managing risks associated with student behaviour. Risk management materials for this level are located on the OHS webpage, Risk Management, Student Behaviour.

If the school requires additional expertise to assist in the risk management process, the regional student support services staff are available to provide advice and facilitate the development of behaviour support plans. The regional staff can support schools by advising on and refining risk management plans and linking schools to appropriate support and resources.

Where situations have been identified as requiring expertise beyond the capacity of the school, principals, in consultation with School Education Directors and regional staff can request an Educational Setting and Support Assessment. Additional expertise and leadership is provided by regional student services officers who have been trained to conduct these assessments in consultation with the school.

Schools should contact their regional student support services personnel for further advice on this process. An explanation of this process is on the OHS webpage, Risk Management, Student Behaviour.

Bullying and harassment

Bullying is described in the DET Anti Bullying Plan as behaviour that devalues, isolates and frightens and affects an individual's ability to achieve. It has long term effects on those engaging in bullying behaviour, those who are the subject of bullying behaviour and the onlookers or bystanders.

Bullying can take many forms, but the main types are physical - hitting, kicking, taking belongings; verbal - name calling, insulting, making offensive remarks; social - ignoring, excluding, ostracising, alienating, making inappropriate gestures; psychological - spreading rumours, dirty looks, hiding or damaging possessions; and cyber bullying - offensive messages through email, SMS or other electronic means.

Guidance and resource materials, including steps for developing an anti bullying plan and specific strategies for combating bullying are located on the DET website. In particular the Anti-bullying plan for schools is located on the DET Our Policies webpage.