

Assault in Schools Out of Control

Last month *TEACH Bulletin* looked at how the drug scene in New Zealand state schools was out of control. This month we'll have a squiz at how bullying (a euphemism for assault) is out of control.

Assault and violence at school have been such an integral part of the accepted background noise of schools for so long, nobody even notices it. Yet now and again incidents surface to the notice of the media that give us an idea of what hellish places these institutions really are.

Stand-down and suspension rates increased in 2005 over 2004. Stand-downs went from 28 to 30 per 1,000 students (only 24 back in 2000¹), and suspensions went from 6.5 to 7 per 1,000. Now this is a huge number when you consider that one third of schools did not use stand-downs and three-quarters did not suspend any students.² So does this mean some schools really have a lot of bad students while others don't? No. It means some schools do not resort to stand downs or suspensions, but keep the bad kids on campus where they can continue to negatively influence the rest.

Palmerston North Boys' High School rector Tim O'Connor said the stand-down system is nothing more than "an extended holiday". O'Connor requires some students to stay at school and come back in their holidays as well. The most common reasons for stand-downs included continual disobedience, physical and verbal assault on students and staff, sexual misconduct and use of alcohol.¹

We all understand that most students who do these things are not stood down or suspended....only those who are so bad they cannot be ignored. Such activities done at the many schools who don't use stand-downs continue unabated.

"Teacher harassment is becoming more common and low-level verbal abuse has become a common feature in the teaching environment," said David Ivory, chairman of the Canterbury region of the Post-Primary Teachers' Association.

Pushing Compulsory PreSchool Is Madness

Three and a half years ago the then Minister of Education Trevor Mallard promised \$8.8M to construct and upgrade 89 early childhood centres.¹ That is, the MoE was using wads of our tax dollars on pre-compulsory schooling, something that is not part of their brief. The state is also using financial carrots to entice parents to dump their children at such places for at least 20 hours a week. We had the phone call from WINZ who tried everything to talk us into taking the money. We told them to keep their money: we'd rather have our children.

The NZ Central Government has a policy to provide every three and four-year-old with up to 20 hours of free early childhood education a week. Let's be honest about this: it is hardly "education" in any kind of academic sense when minding 20 or so children at that

age at the same time in the same place. It is child minding, plain and simple. It is also demonstrable by plenty of research that separating young children from their mums for long periods is not good for them.²

Research by the New Zealand Institute of Educational Research said the Government policy would waste millions of dollars on those children already in preschool while the disadvantaged who don't attend now will continue not to attend. This policy is due to be implemented in 2007 and should cost \$105M per year.³

Everyone wants to slice this pie and to make sure they get their slice. Sue Thorne of the Early Childhood Council says the plan should be modified to target the most "at-risk" children, meaning

tion. The PPTA has developed guidelines to promote teacher safety and deal with disruptive and violent students, including the possibility of teachers going on strike.³

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school's reputation) or dealt with by giving the offender "an extended holiday". Adults who committed the crimes that routinely go unpunished on the school grounds would be jailed, heavily fined or forced to attend various counselling or re-education courses.

Take the Upper Hutt 14-year-old who decked the technology teacher on June 20 with a single unprovoked punch, delivered without warning, allegedly after the boy was reprimanded for being late. The Heretaunga College teacher was knocked to the floor, hit his head and suffered a bleeding nose, loosened teeth, bruising and "minor jaw damage." The kid is being dealt with by the police youth aid section. He has not been arrested and no charges have been laid. The matter is likely to go to a family group conference, but in the meantime, the Education Ministry says the college must now try and place the boy at another school. If necessary the ministry can force a local school to take him.⁴ No justice; just shifting the rot to another location so it can start rotting kids there too. What a system!

The case of ex-Dannevirke maths

teacher Gregg Smith is also very instructive. The students obviously disliked this American from the start, for he says he was consistently abused, verbally and physically, for a year and a half; students deliberately misbehaved and organised a petition to get him "fired"; he was called a "paedophile", a "pervert" and "gayboy". He says one *continuous* comment from students was, "we're going to send that Yankee back to America." And he got death threats over the phone. Even parents got stuck in, blaming him for their children not passing NCEA.⁵

Smith was a first-time teacher and may have been both unprepared for the reality of New Zealand state classrooms and possessing a character that didn't cope well with the situation. But that does not excuse the students' behaviour. I remember how my classmates destroyed at least one first-time teacher who simply couldn't take the heat we poured on day after day....and that was nearly 40 years ago. The point is that schools can do nothing about this kind of thing, and if your child

happens to be there, he or she simply gets caught up in the degrading influence of these low-life actions of their peers.

In addition, if the teacher is simply no good – and we all know plenty of those are still in classrooms – not only is the teacher a bad influence, his or her very inability to control the class will cause the students to rev each other up to worse and worse antics. Smith said, "Students were aggressively opposed to learning," and "I received no support from the school, rather, they blamed me for students' behaviour." He is either showing a very poor character of trying to shift blame to others or there is a real problem with the students or with the school

management. Or all three. Or some combination. Whatever the situation, that environment is the *last* place into which parents should send their children believing it will build them up. Such environments are thoroughly negative.

Other behaviour Smith says he endured included water-soaked tampons thrown around the room, students thumping him in the hallway and saying they were going to "bash his head in", students jumping out of windows during NCEA assessments, pouring Twink on each others' heads, firing erasers at him and making suggestive comments about him looking up girls' skirts and at the boys' backsides when in class.⁵

According to the *Manawatu Standard*, Smith says there is a culture of workplace bullying at the school. He was forced to sign a termination agreement and sent home to think about his "character flaws" which school officials apparently believed incited the students' bad behaviour. "I'm not the only teacher this has happened to. People are being bullied into hiding the uncomfortable truth; students are not learning."⁵

Correction: Plenty of learning takes place on all school campuses: but we home educators don't want our children learning it!

All this just highlights several reasons why we home educate. We don't have to put up with bad egg students or teachers. Even when these bad influences are not in the same classes as our children, they still impact the rest of the students' attitudes and the whole school dynamic and environment for months, even years at a stretch. And then it becomes nearly invisible. Dannevirke High School Board of Trustees chairman Tony Rhodes said of these acts of hooliganism described above, "I'm not aware of the behaviour at the school being any worse than any other school." Yes, they're all equally bad.

Smith is taking a personal grievance claim against the school for not providing a safe working environment. Does anyone act on behalf of the students and file a class action suit against the school for not providing a safe learning environment? The

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Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
and reject not your mother's teaching.
— Proverbs 1:8

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Labour Department says the threat of violence is a recognised hazard in many occupations and education is no exception.⁵ But nobody does anything. Parents are just expected to send their vulnerable children into these unsafe environments, and the children are just expected to keep a stiff upper lip, head down, shoulder to the wheel, etc., until their time is up. No way, José! Don't ever submit your children to such institutionalised abuse. And get your friends to pull their children out too.

It is particularly bad when the students themselves begin not to notice and downplay abuse that happens to them. A 13-year-old girl in Palmerston North was repeatedly indecently assaulted (groped) by three lads in class.⁶ Complaints to the teachers were ignored. When she wrote to the school principal, there was action. But she asked the principal not to tell her parents nor did she lodge a complaint with the police. One simply is astounded and wonders why?

This is easy to explain. Being away at school for six hours a day for the past seven years has taught the girl that the school claims her first allegiance, rather than her parents, her own self-respect or a desire to see justice done. The girl knows she has to spend several more years in enforced socialisation with these guys and that they have the power to make life very miserable for her in ways that will cause the teachers to be even slower to act. She also sus-

pects the principal and teachers will not be so kindly disposed toward her if her parents come down there and read the riot act in each of their faces. The dual standard that still prevails, that "boys will be boys" and that the girl probably brought the groping upon herself due to provocative dress or demeanour. Once the whole sordid story gets out, what will that do for her reputation around school? So best keep it under wraps as much as possible. She knows the boys will not be effectively punished and will be thought of as studs in many quarters. Who knows how much persecution she might get from complaining to the point of bringing the school into disrepute? The girl has already learned these survival skills at school and is simply putting them into practice: it is overall easier to suffer in silence than try to get justice.

As it is, what has happened? The school is not named in the paper "to protect the girl's identity"! Do you believe that? I don't. There are four large high schools she could be at: QEC, Freyberg, St Peters and Awatapu. They are more likely trying to protect the reputation of the school. The school's board chairman says they know nothing about it while the girl's father says he has talked to this chairman about avenues open to him for redress. And if it was that serious to protect her identity, why is it the boys are still in her class every day? She is given absolutely no consideration for modesty, but has to endure total revelation of her identity among those she knows and doesn't know all over the school, no privacy from the staring eyes and pointing fingers of the curious on her campus, from hearing the gossip and tales of those all around her, from her enforced close proximity to those who assaulted her. In the adult world these guys would be looking at a jail term of up to seven years. At school they can commit the crime; continue their daily routines as before; enjoy a degree of status among their mates, anonymity from the general public and apparent immunity from any penalties or punishments. One way the girl may learn to cope is

to decide that being indecently assaulted is no big deal, the attitude apparently taken by the school system.

In commenting after all of this, the *Manawatu Standard* Editorial of Tuesday 29 August 2006 (page 12) said, "Schools are extremely sensitive about their public image...No organisation or group in the community will defend itself against negative publicity as aggressively as a school. And that's understandable, because they are institutions for which pride is an important part of the culture, and this pride extends out to the families who send children to the schools. What also comes in to it, it must be said, is the pressure to maintain roll numbers. This affects a school's funding and teacher numbers. Schools fear negative publicity will drive potential students away and schools will do almost anything they can to avoid this circumstance."

There it is: the twin driving factors behind the state school system: pride and money. An officer of the MoE head office once told me it was politics and money. I can see how even parents would go into denial that such things would go on in *their* school or that *their* children were involved and so gang up against the victimised girl and her family before questioning the school. Aren't you glad you teach your children at home?

Notes:

1. *Manawatu Standard*, 6 July 2006, "Five-year-olds among pupils stood down", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3723345a7694,00.html>
2. NZPA, 5 July 2006, "Stand-down and suspension rates increase", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3721352a7694,00.html>
3. *The Press*, 24 August 2006, "Teachers may strike over safety in class", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3774320a7694,00.html>
4. *Dominion Post*, 3 July 2006, "14-year-old schoolboy KOs teacher", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3719286a7694,00.html>
5. *Manawatu Standard*, 28 August 2006, "Teacher resigns after students forced him out", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3778598a7694,00.html> (emphasis added).
6. *Manawatu Standard*, 24 August 2006, "Father demands school investigate alleged assault", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3775111a7694,00.html>

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the ones (like mine) who don't currently get removed from their own home in order to attend pre-school institutions. Janet Sinclair, acting supervisor of E Tipu E Rea, the Aranui-Wainoni Community Child-care Centre in Christchurch, said that would be unfair to many parents who already had their children in early-childhood centres but were struggling to pay the fees.³

Once the central government gets involved, the money becomes the big attraction. The NZEI teachers' union has reached an agreement with the NZ Childcare Association to see leading "teachers" in these pre-school institutions reach pay parity with principals of secondary schools by July 2008. This is a lot of our tax money since over 400 teachers are involved.⁴

As parents swallow the marketing of these glorified baby-sitting clubs, competition is sure to become keen, if overseas experience is anything to go by. In Manhattan, places for three year olds can top US\$10,000 a year. Parents are asked to write admission essays about their babies. Because places are in short supply, parents with twins and triplets are encouraged to declare their willingness to separate their children among institutions to increase chances of getting into their first choice, says Emily Glickman of Abacus Guide Educational Consulting. Yes, the pre-school game provides business for consultants as well. Other hassles to secure a place include time-consuming interviews, observed play sessions, rising tuition costs and application fees and preferences shown to siblings and families who have connections to the school.⁵

The idea to make preschool compulsory has already been raised in New Zealand...after all, it would guarantee a minimum level of business and income for these preschool institutions and consultants. Proponents argue that it will improve academic attainment. It is believed that because of their early entrance, the children will be ready to learn when they enter the formative years of education.

In 2000, the Program for Interna-

tional Study Assessment (PISA) compared the academic scores of children from 32 industrialized nations in reading literacy, mathematics and science. The results showed that children who have to start school at a very young age do not consistently outperform those who start later.

In a 1999 study reporting the Third International Mathematics and Science results (TIMS) for the eighth grade, a comparable result was found. Despite having a compulsory attendance age of seven, which is later than almost any other European country, Finland held the top ranking in all test subjects.

Singapore, which also scored high in the PISA and TIMS assessments, does not have any publicly funded early education programs. On the other hand, Sweden, which has some of the most comprehensive early child care programs in Europe, was one of the lowest-scoring nations.

Studies of early childhood education indicate it might not be in the best interest of children. David Elkind, professor of child development at Tufts University, wrote in 1987: "When we instruct children in academic subjects ... at too early an age, we miseducate them; we put them at risk for short-term stress and long-term personality damage."

In a 2005 Stanford University/University of California research study, "The Influence of Preschool Centers on Children's Development Nationwide," it was reported: "We find that attendance in preschool centers, even for short periods of time each week, hinders the rate at which young children develop social skills and display the motivation to engage in classroom tasks, as reported by their kindergarten teachers."⁶

Notes:

1. *New Zealand Herald*, 5 December 2002, "More Places Created in Early Childhood Education", <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=3007923>

2. *TEACH Bulletin* No. 66, Janu-

ary 2003, "Millions for pre-school".

3. *The Press*, 27 January 2006, "Disadvantaged kids may miss out", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3552698a6160,00.html>

4. NZPA, 16 March 2006, "Pay parity for childhood centre leaders", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3604964a7694,00.html>

5. *New York Times*, 3 March 2006, "In baby boomlet, preschool derby is the fiercest yet", <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/03/education/03preschool.html?ex=1142744400&en=84a277e5d2e964f8&ei=5070>

6. *Washington Times*, 3 April 2006, "Compulsory attendance deserves F", <http://www.hslda.org/docs/news/washingtontimes/200604040.asp>

Social Workers New Saviours of School System

The Education Review Office (ERO) has found that one in five schools are failing to meet student learning needs and up to 20 per cent of children are struggling academically. Nevertheless, ERO head Karen Sewell told a parliamentary committee that the education system is working well for 80 per cent of Kiwi kids. Yeah, right. That's why Parliament's Education and Science Select Committee has launched an inquiry into literacy and numeracy standards to find out why so many students are failing.¹

Feilding Truancy Officer Ted Iraia says a lot of kids are failing because they can't read and write. "I think schools are only interested in the high achievers. For the ones that are struggling, it's just tough luck...A lot of these students are carrying issues or have behavioural difficulties." But according to Mr Iraia, of every 20 students needing assistance, there is only enough funding to help six.

Truancy officers can at least make sure students attend the institutions and are kept off the streets. Feilding truancy services are called upon four out of five days each week and the officers are referred to between

six and 12 truants during that period. Some individual students are rounded up three days a week.²

Marlborough Girls' College has decided to hire a social worker to meet part of the problem and hopefully keep them interested in education. This is part of a wider initiative funded by the MoE to increase student engagement with their education.

According to acting principal Karen Stewart, "There is an increasing expectation from the community for us to provide a lot of services and support." Board of trustees chairwoman Bev Moore said, "Schools are there primarily to teach. The difficulty is an increasingly complex community with a range of needs, where so many additional responsibilities are seen to belong to schools that are the role of the community and parents. A social worker can work with support staff to access external agencies."³

This is a key concept that we who are concerned to promote home education need to understand. Because there have now been several generations raised up with virtually no other option to compulsory, secular schooling, the parental skills and consciousness of their responsibility to train up their own children is waning more and more. It amounts to a wholesale abdication by parents to the central government. The situation is now lamented by school personnel, "Oh, if only parents would spend more time with their children and become more involved in their lives," and yet it is the school which has caused this problem in the first place. Notice that the social worker is not expected to help parents reclaim their duties or retrain to handle them: no, the social worker is there to plug students and families into other state organisations, furthering the entrenchment of dependency. Home educators are reclaiming back to the family these responsibilities which have been usurped by the state over the years.

Notes:

1. *Dominion Post*, 15 June 2006, "One in five schools failing, says ERO chief", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3700704a7694,00.html>
2. *Manawatu Standard*, 4 August 2006,

"NZ truancy problems worsen", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3754488a7694,00.html>

3. *Marlborough Express*, 5 July 2006, "College girls to get social worker support", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3722266a7694,00.html>

Socialisation at School a Must

In a previous article on page 1 PN Boys' High Rector Tim O'Connor said bad kids get nothing worse than an extended holiday. South Island psychologists warn of much graver outcomes: anti-social behaviour and depression.

Christchurch clinical psychologist Fran Vertue said children and teens away from school for long periods might never become properly socialised because they missed out on vital stages of development. [Can you believe this?!] "If kids are not at school, they're not getting the opportunity to experiment with relationships and find out how to be a good friend." Trying to learn those skills later in life was much harder, Dr Vertue said.

Falling in with a bad crowd, because of being taken away from their peer group, was another potential problem. [Ha! The peer group *is* the problem!] "Kids not at school are more at risk of anti-social behaviour," Dr Vertue said. It could also lead to a phobia of returning to school.

Christchurch counsellor Ken Clearwater was expelled from school at 14 for assaulting a teacher and a prefect and believed it contributed to his misuse of alcohol as a young man. Now working as a counsellor for men who have suffered sexual abuse, he said many of his clients ended up in jail after first being excluded from school. "I'd say 85 per cent to 95 per cent of guys who are in prison are illiterate because they haven't been able to survive the school environment."

Now this is an honest statement. While *The Press* tried to make it sound as if being *excluded* from

school caused the depression and anti-social behaviour, Clearwater said it straight: it was the school which wrecked the kids.

(From *The Press*, 17 July 2006, "Hundreds excluded from school at risk of depression", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3734355a7694,00.html>.)

Molested By the Curriculum

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recently signed a bill requiring even Christian colleges where students receive state grants to condone homosexuality, transsexuality and bisexuality. Charles B. Lowers, the executive director of the pro-family Considering Homeschool organization said that should be over the top for any parent but especially Christian parents, who should pull their children from public school systems.

"'Heck no, our kids won't go!' should be the rallying cry of Christian parents, instead of following the broad road of perversion and destruction that California schools are offering," Lowers said. "It is estimated that anywhere from 80-90 percent of Christians are still sending their children off to government schools – the church is behaving like a bunch of lemmings."

"School-based 'clinics' are expanding to ensure that your daughters get birth control and abortions without you knowing. Now that the homosexuals are dictating curriculum, 80-90 percent of Christians should be homeschooling, not the other way around. Public school is no place for innocent little kids. If they don't get molested by the pervert teachers in the system, their minds and hearts will be molested by the curriculum," said Mr Lowers. "Instead of the traditional three Rs, in California's public schools, children are learning Rebelliousness, Relativism and an R-rated lifestyle."

"The educational establishment in America really has pulled the wool over most parents' eyes. Almost every parent teaches their child to speak English or whatever is their primary language. They've done the

bulk of the teaching of the basics. But the establishment has put this aura around education and says only certified teachers should be teaching. Those teachers are less qualified than you to teach your children. You know them.”

Well said, Mr Lowers. Well said. Check out his website at www.ConsideringHomeschooling.com.

(From *WorldNetDaily*, 31 August 2006, “California Christians urged to yank kids”, http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=51748)

Hate Mail from PPTA

Ever received any hate mail? Since Family Integrity (F.I.) started up, they have. One example below is of interest because it came from the PPTA (Post Primary Teachers’ Association) email address and though, as is typical of cowards, was unsigned, the writer did refer to the name of a top executive. Family Integrity emailed the PPTA head office three times now wondering if this is the kind of correspondence the PPTA executive endorses. So far, no response. Family Integrity’s National Director also informed them that he will continue to home educate if this is the kind of person his children would be forced to spend six hours a day with, five days a week.

#1 From: ...@ppta.org.nz **to** F.I.
Sent: Wednesday, July 19, 2006
Subject: RE: Family Integrity

Please take us off your mailing list. I regard your desperate need to beat children (and women from time to time I presume if they don’t do your bidding) as a totally perverted form of sexual sadism. Don’t give me this stuff about “in a loving way...” Note that it’s men doing all the running on this suggesting that these are blokes who are physically, emotionally and sexually inadequate and the only way they can restore their sense of self-importance, power, control and domination is to beat people who are smaller than them then try and rationalise it by reference to the Bible. Sickoes!

#2 From: F.I. **to** ...@ppta.org.nz
Sent: Wednesday, 19 July 2006
Subject: RE: Family Integrity

Dear ?

We are sorry you see things that way. I will remove you from our mailing list, but need to know what name to remove. Could you please specify?

As to your evaluation of corporal correction being a male sexual thing accompanied by Bible rationalisation - how does this fit with the fact that recent NZ polls show more than 80% of the population (that includes women, and people who aren’t Christians) think that the right of parents to smack their children by way of correction should be retained?

#3 From:@ppta.org.nz **to** F.I.
Sent: Wednesday, July 19, 2006
Subject: RE: Family Integrity

....@ppta.org.nz] is the address it’s coming to. The name may be _____ I don’t know. In response to your comment - regardless of the polls all the running on this is being done by a group of very weird sounding men who I would never leave alone with children because there’s something very creepy about them. (Shades of Graeme Capill) Do you endorse slavery because it’s in the Bible? There’s some very convenient selection going on here. You obviously regard your “God” as a bit dim-witted and unable to recognise self-interest when it’s masquerading as moral righteousness. As to the polls; Abraham Lincoln put it best when he said “if all the people say a silly thing, it’s still a silly thing.” I can’t imagine you treating a poll which said a majority of the population favoured gay marriage as being legitimate. Again, it’s an argument of unprincipled opportunistic convenience not intelligent consideration.

(End of hate mail exchange.)

Family Integrity recently tried to reduce the Section 59 issue down to 3 points, why home educators need to be concerned:

1. In the same way that we are not endeavouring to tell others how to

rear their own children, we find it abhorrant and offensive that the central government would take it upon itself to paternalistically tell families how they are to rear their own children. It is unjustifiably encroaching its jurisdiction into the jurisdiction of the family government. This is what Family Integrity is promoting: opposition to unjustifiable intrusion of the central government and other self appointed and usually state-funded child advocacy agents into the private affairs of the family.

2. This Bill is first and foremost about repealing parental authority while putting up a smokescreen about reducing violence and abuse against children. Bradford made this abundantly clear in her explanatory note where she says repeal will put parents in the same place as everyone else. That sentence is followed immediately by the threat of hammering parents with Section 194(a) of the Crimes Act, assault on a child, worth as much as two years in jail. That sentence is then followed immediately by her stated intention that nothing in common law should be raised to neutralise this intention. Read it for yourself at: <http://www.knowledge-basket.co.nz/gpprint/docs/bills/20052711.txt>.

3. Repeal will cause any use of force for correction, training or discipline (not protection, removal from harm’s way or providing for the necessities of life) to be an act of criminal assault. This has been firmly established: I have it in writing from two Police Commissioners (the recent past and the present). It means all parents will be assumed to be guilty and only await being charged. The whole culture of child social welfare is to intervene earlier and earlier. In the area of child welfare the state has adopted a guilty until proven innocent stance, totally at odds with our historical position of innocent until proven guilty, a stance held up as the gold standard for a proper justice system. Real abuse invariably happens when children are removed from their parents: if they are spared physical abuse by the foster agency, they are never free from the emotional trauma of being kidnapped by strangers and held hostage by more strangers. *This* is evil.