

Report summary

Bullying is a complex social issue that can cause long-term harm to those involved. It occurs in all aspects of life and is not just confined to schools. Addressing bullying involves a wide range of stakeholders, including families, parents/carers, the broader community, and schools. Schools play an important role preventing and responding to bullying. But they cannot do it on their own, and they must work in partnership with parents/carers and stakeholders to influence student behaviours related to bullying.

This report examines whether the Department of Education's (the department's) strategies are effective in supporting the protection of students from bullying. We looked at how the department coordinates its strategies and resources and works with its schools.

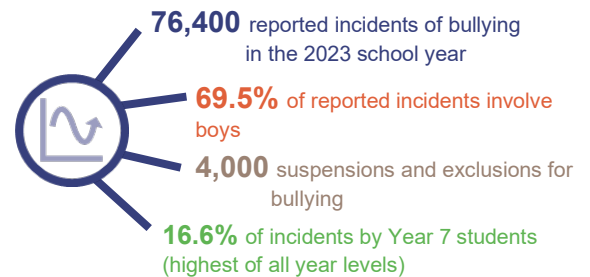
The department's strategies to reduce bullying

The department sets the overall direction and requirements for its schools to deliver education services. Its strategies include a clear focus on student wellbeing, academic achievement, and building respectful and positive relationships which promote inclusion. Central to this is its delivery of health and wellbeing education. These areas are key in the management of student bullying. However, the department could more explicitly communicate how its strategies address bullying, particularly for students and parents. Its strategies do not set objectives, actions, or measures of success specific to the management of bullying.

The department requires each of its schools to develop and implement a student code of conduct. This documents and communicates each school's approach to bullying. If developed appropriately, the code of conduct will align with evidence-based approaches to reducing bullying. The department can enhance its review and monitoring of school codes of conduct. It should also improve the guidance provided to schools to support a more consistent application of mandatory elements. All the 50 codes of conduct we examined (out of 1,265 state schools) were missing one or more of the department's required elements. Schools often left out information on who to contact about bullying and how parents/carers could escalate a concern if not satisfied with the school's response. Many are also lengthy. As a key communication tool for students and parents/carers, the department could consider making the proforma for student codes of conduct shorter and more user friendly for parents/carers.

The department is enhancing its use of data to support its management of behavioural incidents (which include bullying). In late 2023, new dashboards were developed to enable school-level and statewide monitoring of behavioural incidents (these remain in the pilot phase with implementation anticipated for mid-2025). The department can further enhance its use of data to inform its approaches to bullying. While it records data on bullying incidents, limited data is captured on students who have experienced bullying. Similar findings have been raised in previous reviews, such as the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability*. Capturing this information could allow for broader analysis and assist the department to enhance its support for students affected by bullying. The department would also benefit from greater data on emerging areas, such as cyber bullying. This would enable it to better identify and analyse cyber bullying to inform its responses, including education to parents/carers.

Figure 1
Key statistics – reported incidents of state school student bullying (2023)



Source: Queensland Audit Office from Department of Education data.

Monitoring the effectiveness of strategies

The department is not able to effectively determine the extent to which its strategies are effective in preventing and responding to bullying. This is partly due to the absence of measures specific to bullying incidents to monitor and evaluate against. The day-to-day management of bullying is the responsibility of schools when it occurs within the school or affects the order of the school. Individual instances are managed within this environment. While the department utilises periodic reviews of its schools to assess performance over a variety of areas, such as academic performance, these reviews do not specifically address bullying practices (they consider areas such as suspensions and exclusions which could be the result of bullying).

Stakeholder experiences and opinions are an important source of information that can be used to evaluate effectiveness and inform the further development of its strategies, policies, and resources. The department surveys stakeholders on wellbeing matters and on broader experiences with schooling. This can provide some indications on their experience of bullying. However, the department could better understand the perceptions and experiences of students, parents/carers, and teachers specific to bullying by including some specific questions about bullying and how schools manage it.

Supporting schools to reduce student bullying

The department provides its schools with a variety of resources to help them manage bullying. These resources are important, given the demands on principals and teachers. Resources currently include:

- positive behaviour and respectful relationship curriculum and teaching materials
- access to wellbeing and other professionals to support students impacted by bullying
- support for investigation and management of cyber-related incidents
- access to some training materials relevant to bullying and behaviour management.

The department also leads national bullying initiatives that provide resources to schools, parents, and students.

The department expects schools to work with key stakeholders such as parents/carers and community groups to support a collaborative approach to the management of bullying. To support better engagement with parents/carers in their busy lives, the department needs to streamline its information and resources so they are easy to access and use. The department could also strengthen the tools and guidance available to assist schools in engaging more effectively with these stakeholders. This engagement forms a core component of better practice approaches to bullying.

Schools are provided a range of training materials to assist them in delivering educational services. However, schools would benefit from access to more targeted training on how to identify and respond to bullying incidents. In 2024, the department launched a new classroom management hub for teachers with materials related to learning, wellbeing, and positive behaviours. This is an important step, but schools would benefit from easier access to materials to assist both teachers and other support staff, such as teacher aides.

