

## **Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce**

### **Discussion Paper 1 – Options for legislating against coercive control and the creation of a standalone domestic violence offence**

#### **Department of Education response**

Dear Justice McMurdo

Thank you to the Chair and members of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce for providing the Department of Education with the opportunity to consider *Discussion Paper 1: Options for legislating against coercive control and the creation of a standalone domestic violence offence* and to respond to questions of relevance.

#### **Question 2: What aspects of women's attempts to survive and resist abuse should be taken into account, when examining coercive control?**

When examining the issue of coercive control and its impacts on women, consideration may be given to:

- ensuring consideration is given to the safety of the victim and their children;
- ensuring victims are empowered to make decisions to increase the safety and wellbeing of themselves and their children;
- that decisions made are in the best interests of children and the victim;
- providing continuity of child care and schooling that considers child safety and wellbeing, including the impacts of trauma on development;
- ensuring timely access to specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services;
- ensuring that frontline service provision is differentiated to meet the diverse needs of Queenslanders;
- ensuring Queensland Government specialist first responder agencies and DFV services have a comprehensive understanding of coercive control;
- including information on coercive control, indicators and risk factors within common DFV safety and risk management frameworks and tools;
- providing access to emergency, short and medium-term financial and housing assistance, where required;
- supporting workplace responses that allow for victims to remain in employment or to seek and gain employment or training;
- providing access to counselling services that have a comprehensive understanding of coercive control and the impacts of trauma on victims and their children; and
- continuing work to further integrate agency and frontline service delivery responses.

#### **Question 3: What should be done in the community to improve understanding about what coercive control is, the acute danger it presents to women and to improve how people seek help or intervene?**

The Department of Education supports the need for broad awareness campaigns to increase understanding of coercive control and its risks and impacts. Education and raising awareness of this issue should identify that coercive control is a form of gender-based violence, which can be prevented and reduced by addressing the gendered-drivers of violence against women.

To effectively address the gendered-drivers of violence against women, approaches need to include actions that will increase gender equality and respect at the individual, organisational, system and societal levels.

While community awareness raising campaigns are important, legislation, equal access to resources, gender equal workplace practices, actions that challenge violence and supportive attitudes and behaviours in the community need to be addressed by government, business and community organisations.

The media's role in accurately highlighting the gendered-nature of this form of violence, its prevalence, in not perpetuating stereotypical gendered-attitudes and in ensuring accountability is placed on perpetrators and not victims, is important in shaping the views of the community.

Respectful relationships education in schools, which addresses the gendered-drivers of violence, plays an important contribution to positively shaping the attitudes and behaviours of children and young people, and preventing domestic, family and sexual violence in all its forms, including coercive control.

**Question 6: If you are a member of a mainstream service or represent a mainstream service provider:**

**a) What training relevant to coercive control and domestic and family violence is currently available in your industry?**

*Domestic and family violence training and resources*

Staff supports

The Department of Education has previously provided face to face training to principals, managers, supervisors and key identified staff on:

- understanding the gendered-drivers that underpin domestic, family and sexual violence
- understanding power and control and perpetrator tactics, including coercive control;
- recognising the many forms domestic and family violence (DFV) takes;
- signs/indicators of DFV or abuse,
- the impacts of DFV on health, wellbeing and performance;
- the department's *Supporting staff impacted by domestic and family violence* policy and provisions; and
- departmental and external specialist service supports available and referral pathways.

Further DFV training for managers and identified staff is planned to commence mid-2021.

All departmental staff have access to two online training programs on DFV.

Content on domestic and family violence in the workplace is included in the department's Mandatory All Staff Training materials.

A guideline to support the department's *Supporting staff affected by domestic and family violence* policy and fact sheets, including Domestic and Family Violence workplace safety plans have been developed to increase understanding and to respond to staff impacted by DFV.

### Student supports

A range of fact sheets to support staff responding to students impacted by DFV has been developed and made available to all staff. A DFV student safety checklist and plan have also been made available to identify and put in place practices to support the safety and wellbeing of students, where domestic and family violence risks are known or suspected.

#### *Student Protection reporting, training and resources*

All Queensland state school staff must complete student protection training annually. This entails information on identifying and responding to and where required, the reporting of suspected abuse and harm. This includes reporting harm associated with exposure to and/or experiencing DFV.

Staff also have access to detailed guidance on identifying and responding to suspected harm to students through the department's *Student Protection* procedure, guidelines and supporting fact sheets and resources.

DFV is identified as a form of harm within the *Student Protection* guidelines. Information on possible indicators of DFV is included within this document.

Online Student Protection training modules are available to all departmental staff. A student protection case study that examines the risks and impacts on students in households affected by DFV is available online, for staff to access.

## **b) How are you currently supporting victims of coercive control and domestic and family violence?**

### *Staff impacted by DFV*

The Department of Education has in place a policy, a guideline and provisions to support employees experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV), including coercive control. This policy is in line with the Queensland Government *Support for employees affected by domestic and family violence directive 03/20*.

Provisions include access to paid leave, employee assistance counselling, rehabilitation support, flexible work arrangements, transfer or relocation and DFV workplace safety risk checklists and plans.

### *Students impacted by DFV*

The Department of Education has developed a range of fact sheets and resources, including DFV student safety risk assessments and plans to support staff with recognising and understanding the indicators and impacts of DFV.

The department has put in place a DFV Liaison Officer network to provide advice and support on DFV issues impacting students and staff and the operations of schools and departmental workplaces.

The department's Principal Advisors, Student Protection provide consultancy advice to schools on student protection matters, including responding to and supporting students impacted by DFV.

A range of school and regionally-based departmental positions are available to support and refer students impacted by DFV to internal staff or external specialist services.

Internal support staff, including guidance officers; Principal Advisors, Mental Health; chaplains; youth support coordinators; school youth-based health nurses; welfare officers; community education counsellors and school-based police officers are able to provide advice on DFV impacts on students and a referral to external specialist DFV and counselling services, where required.

Identified staff also act as an associate member of the Queensland Government's DFV Integrated Service Response and High-Risk Teams and as core members of the Queensland Government's Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect teams.

**c) What is working well?**

Embedding information on domestic and family violence (DFV) in policies, guidelines, resources and training materials is an effective way of ensuring staff are able to access timely information on DFV, as it impacts staff and students.

Given the Department of Education's workforce size, geographic spread, diverse community contexts and varying roles school-based staff play, use of a differentiated training model, with various modes for delivering information, is most effective when developing school and departmental workforce capability. A differentiated model allows training to be tailored to meet the differing needs of key staff cohorts.

**d) What could be done better?**

The Department of Education's review on opportunities to enhance education on consent and reporting of sexual assault has identified a need to develop resources and/or training materials to support staff in responding to disclosures of domestic and family violence (DFV), sexual violence and abuse.

State school staff are well-versed in reporting student harm concerns under the *Child Protection Act (1999)*.

The provisions for sharing relevant information to help assess and manage serious DFV risks, under the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act (2012)* are less well-known. The opportunity to provide targeted training for key personnel on the DFV information sharing provisions will be examined by the department.

**Question 15. What in the current integrated service response works well to enable effective responses to coercive control?**

The Department of Education is an associate member of the domestic and family violence (DFV) High Risk Teams. Given the focus on assessing and managing risks to the mother/victim, the department believes our existing associate member role to be appropriate.

Relevant information on state school students is shared with High Risk Teams and between High Risk Teams and schools or the department, as required.

**Question 64: Would requiring mainstream services (for example, health and education service providers) to report domestic violence and coercive control behaviours improve the safety of women and girls?**

The Department of Education is mindful of its role in helping to protect children and young people from harm, including harm associated with witnessing and/or experiencing domestic and family violence, in all its forms.

Reports of alleged significant harm to a student as a result of domestic and family violence, where there may not be a parent able and willing to protect the child from harm, are reported under the *Child Protection Act 1999*, in line with the department's Student Protection procedure.

Every state school employee must complete student protection training annually. This training reinforces the department's requirement for all staff to report suspicions of harm or risk of harm to a student or child, in accordance with legislation and the department's Student Protection procedure, including harm impacting on students associated with domestic and family violence.

Non-departmental employees and visitors to Queensland state schools are also required to complete student protection training and report suspicions of harm or risk of harm to a student or child, in line with the department's Student Protection procedure.

State school staff also have access to detailed guidance on identifying and responding to suspected harm to students through the Department of Education's Student Protection procedure, guidelines and supporting fact sheets and resources.

The department's Student Protection guidelines provide information on the many forms domestic and family violence can take, noting domestic and family violence can range from physical and sexual assault and abuse to emotional, financial, social, psychological and verbal abuse to stalking, including cyber-stalking.

The guidelines, which highlight that domestic and family violence is underpinned by power, control and fear, also provide information on the possible indicators of harm that might be observed in students exposed to or experiencing domestic and family violence.

Additionally, a range of fact sheets, which provide more detailed information on the drivers, forms and impacts of domestic and family violence, have been developed to support schools in responding to domestic and family violence impacting students. Similar fact sheets exist to support managers and principals in identifying and responding to domestic and family violence risks identified in departmental employees.

A fact sheet for schools and an information sharing form support the sharing of information by authorised Department of Education staff, under the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012*. These provisions allow authorised departmental staff to share relevant information on domestic and family violence risks with other prescribed entities.

Key departmental officers have been identified as Associate Members for the Queensland Government's Domestic and Family Violence High Risk Teams and share information with members of these teams, as requested and required.

**Additional question: Does education about domestic and family violence and specifically, coercive control form part of the current Queensland kindergarten and school curriculum? Please provide the details as part of your submission.**

The Department of Education's Prep to Year 12 *Respectful relationships education program* provides students with age-appropriate information on domestic and family violence (DFV), including information that examines power imbalance and gender inequality within relationships for senior students.

Opportunity exists to include additional content on coercive control within the enhanced *Respectful relationships education program* and/or within additional supporting resources or training materials.

The development of a strategy to build teacher capability to deliver respectful relationships education that examines DFV, including coercive control and sexual violence and addresses the gendered-drivers of violence against women, has been identified as a priority.