

Sunday 12 April 2009

SAFE SCHOOLS: EMPOWERING SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TO COMBAT SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Victorian school principals would be given back the power to keep their schools safe under a Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition plan to stem rising schoolyard violence.

At a time when violence in Victorian schools is increasing dramatically, with an average of more than 12 assaults a week and a growing number of violent offenders aged between 10 and 14, Victorian parents, teachers and students need support in stopping schoolyard violence.

Schools help young people develop the values that will guide them for the rest of their lives, but today in Victoria violence is increasing among school-age children inside and outside schools.

Labor will remove the right of school principals to expel and suspend students, undermining the ability of principals to swiftly and strongly discipline violent and disruptive students.

The Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition will give power back to school principals because schools, teachers and parents need support in stopping violence in schools.

The Coalition's **Safe Schools** plan includes:

- ***Giving principals the right to suspend or expel students at their own discretion.*** The Coalition will give principals more flexibility to manage poor discipline by giving principals the right to expel and suspend students for the appropriate length of time at their discretion. Labor is currently seeking to remove principals' right to expel and suspend students following changes by the Department of Education that will cut the total number of days a Victorian student can be suspended from ten to three. Removing this power creates a bureaucratic barrier to schools enforcing discipline and reducing violence.
- ***Granting principals the right to ban dangerous items from school grounds and introducing legislation to support this right.*** Knives and other weapons are being used in Victorian schools to bully

students and disrupt classes. Principals have a serious lack of clarity in their powers to control the introduction and use of dangerous items on school property. The Coalition will develop legislation confirming the right of principals to ban or confiscate items considered harmful or dangerous.

- ***Increasing punishment for offences such as assault and vandalism committed on school property by students or others.*** Increasing violence against students and teachers means a stronger approach to school violence is necessary. The Coalition will direct the Sentencing Advisory Council to immediately explore the introduction of stronger punishments for offences that occur on school property, including assault, vandalism and property damage.
- ***Investing in professional development for teachers to help maintain discipline in schools.*** Victorian teachers need help in dealing with difficult, disruptive and violent students. The Coalition will establish a \$2 million professional development program to help train teachers, conducted by local and international experts in non-violent dispute resolution. This world's-best-practice professional development will give teachers additional training and support to establish and maintain discipline in the classroom.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE: BACKGROUND

There were 1,227 reported assaults in schools between January 2006 and August 2008, an average of more than 12 assaults per week. The number of assaults in and around schools increased by more than 150 per cent between 2000 and 2005. Since 2000, the number of violent offenders aged between 10 and 14 has increased by more than 80 per cent. (Source: Victoria Police crime statistics)

Most available school disruption indicators increased substantially between 2007 and 2008, including aggressive behaviour (up 33 per cent), anti-social behaviour (up 11 per cent), student disappearances (up 46 per cent), school intrusions (up 13 per cent), school lockdowns (52, or an average of one per week) and sexual assault (244 reports).