

'Punish' the unfit teachers

XANTHE KLEINIG
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TEACHERS behaving inappropriately should be "severely" dealt with, a state parents' group recommends.

The group argues in some cases warnings from the Education Department are insufficient.

Child pornography, sexual abuse, alcoholism and fighting with students are among a list of 39 complaints made against public-school teachers this year.

Two teachers were sacked – one

for assault and another for sexual offences perpetrated in the teacher's own family – while six were formally warned and returned to the classroom.

Three others – a teacher who was over-familiar with a student, another accused of "physically handling" pupils and one arrested for disorderly behaviour – were counselled.

South Australian Association of State School Organisations executive director David Knuckey said teachers should be "severely" dealt with.

"I don't think where an inappropriate relationship with a student is proven that a warning is sufficient to deal with such a gross transgression of responsibility," he said.

"Teachers have an incredible responsibility to the children in their care."

The Education Department's "first and foremost priority has to be the welfare of the children", Mr Knuckey said.

Allegations made against staff in public schools – including principals and pre-school directors –

obtained by *The Advertiser* under Freedom of Information laws include:

INDECENT assault of a child.

SEXUAL relations with a pupil.

ALTERCATIONS with some students.

INCAPACITY as a teacher because of mental illness.

Education Minister Jane Lomax-Smith said in an emailed statement: "I expect the department to treat every allegation seriously and take appropriate action based on evidence."

Twenty of the 39 allegations in

the year to September are still under investigation by staff in the "overworked" special investigations unit, prompting the Australian Education Union to call for more staff.

Teachers suffered even if they were proved innocent, said AEU state president Andrew Gohl.

Last year there were 43 allegations, an average of one for each school week.

Opposition education spokesman Iain Evans said he had "confidence" offences committed in schools were reported.