

Fines skip over truancy causes

TIM WILLIAMS
EDUCATION REPORTER

PARENTS and school staff have condemned plans to raise fines for truancy, saying bigger penalties won't fix a complex problem, citing bullying as one of the major reasons students miss school.

More than 90 per cent of respondents to a survey by a key parent organisation opposed increases to fines, which they say would hurt struggling families.

The State Government has proposed lifting the maximum

penalty for parents taken to court from \$500 up to \$5000, while the Opposition has called for a smaller increase to \$2000.

An overwhelming majority of respondents believed more school-based support for students and families would be more effective than fines.

All of the 91 principals who took part said raising fines would not work.

The survey also delivered a definitive rejection of the Government's plans for \$315 on-the-spot truancy fines, with 84 per cent of more than 1000

participants opposing the idea.

Aside from genuine student illness, respondents identified dissatisfaction with school, poor relationships with teachers, bullying, and level of disadvantage as the top four causes of student absenteeism.

The SA Association of State School Organisations, which conducted the survey, said it was "disturbing" both parents and teachers placed bullying high on their lists of causes.

"There was across the board condemnation of the use of fines to deal with truancy, with

comments labelling it harmful, out of date and ill-considered," director David Nuckey said.

"Parents and educators believe truancy to be a complicated problem, with multiple contributing factors, which won't be solved by fines."

Of the 1043 respondents, 92 per cent were parents and slightly more than half worked in schools.

Education Minister Susan Close said flexible learning programs, attendance and well-being officers, and counsellors were among measures already

used to address truancy. On Saturday, *The Advertiser* revealed the second of two serious truancy court cases, the outcomes of which are expected to inform new legislation to make it easier to prosecute parents.

Court action and fines were only considered in "extreme" cases, Dr Close said yesterday. The survey also found 55 per cent support for principals to be given the power to fire staff.

The Government is doing its own consultation on the issue. Currently, principals can initiate the termination process but the Education Department CEO has final say on sackings.

Opposition education spokesman John Gardner said on-the-spot fines for truancy were a "kneejerk response" that "trivialises the problem".

The Liberal Party's truancy policy, announced last year, would boost numbers of attendance officers by 50 per cent.

On staffing issues, Mr Gardner said the Opposition had long championed greater school autonomy.

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Crows girls going for gold and silver on the glitter strip

ROB GREENWOOD

CROWS co-captain Chelsea Randall hopes diamonds can be her girls' best friend.

As Adelaide began preparations for the inaugural AFLW grand final, the league yesterday announced members of the winning team would receive a custom-made premiership ring.

Marquee player Randall said it was extra incentive ahead of Saturday afternoon's decider against Brisbane at Gold Coast's Metricon Stadium.

"It's something awesome that the AFL has done and something to recognise the inaugural premiership team," she said.

The 22 premiership-winning players and their coach will each be presented with the 18-carat white gold ring carrying the competition's W logo.

The custom-made premiership rings, made by Musson Jewellers, also feature eight white diamonds on each shoulder and the year engraved below with an additional diamond.

Crows supporters will get



READY TO FLY: Crows players Deni Varnhagen, Anne Hatcher, Rhianonn Metcalfe and Dayna Cox prepare for Saturday's inaugural AFLW grand final. Inset, the rings and premiership cup. **Picture: BIANCA DE MARCHI**

the chance to farewell their AFLW heroes at an open training session tomorrow from 5pm at Football Park. Crows co-captain Chelsea Randall said her teammates were on a

high after their thrilling 24-point triumph over Collingwood on Sunday secured their passage to the season finale. She urged supporters to give her side a warm send-off.

"We encourage all our fans to get down here (Football Park)," Randall said yesterday. "We're obviously rapt and so proud and happy with our girls to be where we are and

have this opportunity. Our fans have been incredible over the weeks and we know they'll be right behind us."

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