

Parents behaving badly

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EDUCATION REPORTER

PARENTS are coming on to public school grounds and grabbing, shaking and yelling at students they believe have bullied their children, principals say.

Growing numbers of students are being physically attacked or threatened with violence by parents, with the number of reported incidents rising by 50 per cent last year, from 70 to 105.

According to the Education

Department, most cases involve parents – or step-parents and grandparents – attacking their own children.

But the SA Primary Principals Association was more aware of incidents where parents had targeted other people's kids.

"They can hold the children by the shoulders and actually shake them to the point where the children are very scared," president Pam Kent said.

"They take it in their own hands to fix the situation and

they make it far worse. It's an ignorant, emotional response."

Ms Kent said it was also concerning to learn that some parents attacked their own children at school, though the overall figures were small relative to the student population.

"If they are doing it on school grounds, what are they doing at home?" she said.

In addition to parent violence, there were 45 incidents of other "community members" – such as siblings, extended family or trespassers – attacking

students. That was up from 34 in 2015.

Parent group the SA Association of State School Organisations director David Knuckey said the figures were a disgrace.

"Any attack on a child is appalling," he said. "Nobody wants to see schools turned into fortresses, but protection and prevention must be the focus, and we simply can't have intruders wandering into schools assaulting children."

There were also two cases of volunteers attacking students.

one fewer than the previous year. Police are called when necessary.

Education Department incident management division director Alana Girvin said schools did not tolerate any violence.

"This year, the State Government made it easier for principals to ban disruptive or violent people from schools, and the recently introduced Education Bill also includes tougher penalties of up to \$2500 for people who behave in an offensive manner or use abusive, threat-

ening or insulting language in our schools," she said.

Opposition education spokesman John Gardner said parental violence was "a challenge for our whole community".

"But in the context of a school environment, it is important that we set an example for all of the students who witness this behaviour that it is not OK on any level," he said.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO CONTROL SCHOOL VIOLENCE? TELL US AT ADVERTISER.COM.AU



CANTEENS CATERING FOR ALL TASTES

VARIETY: Magill School students Ella, 7, with a chicken burger, Aiden, 7, with vegan lasagne and Pavahiny, 10, with a falafel salad. Picture: MIKE BURTON/AAP

MARTINA SIMOS

FORGET ordering the Vegemite sandwich, pies and pasties for your child's lunch. This generation has sophisticated tastes which extend to dairy-free, vegetarian, gluten-free and vegan options.

School canteen menus across the state are reflecting the variety of choices influenced by religious, cultural or health decisions.

At the start of the year, Magill School outsourced the school canteen and broadened the menu. The foods offered are vermicelli noodles, falafel, vegan lasagne, roast capsicum ravioli and Mexican burger with smashed avocado.

The most expensive hot food item is quinoa and roasted cauliflower, while the cheapest is oven-baked potato gems.

Deputy principal Daphne Schu-

macher says choosing the right company was based on their culturally diverse school community and the need for a greater variety of foods to be offered.

"When we were selecting the company that was going to run the canteen that was one of the requirements – that they were able to provide for that diverse food selection," she said.

The student representative coun-

cil also plays a part in relaying how the student population are enjoying the foods on offer, suggestions for new food and providing ideas for special food days.

Social analyst Mark McCrindle said the cafe culture had been introduced to the children of Gen Y parents, where they get to try different types of food.

"With a more culturally diverse family base and with more sophis-

ticated dining choices – the culinary pursuits of the cafe culture has been the norm for them," he says.

Seven-year-old Aiden is glad there is a canteen which offers hot food on cold wintry days.

"I love vegetarian pasties," he says. "Mummy helps me (order) – she knows what I like."

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