

Cyberbullying is the Top Social Issue – Principals

By David Knuckey

A survey of public-school principals – conducted by Monash and Deakin universities has found cyberbullying as the top social issue negatively impacting their students.

60% of school leaders placed cyberbullying in their top three issues, followed by:

- racism - 22%
- mental health - 20%
- poverty - 20%.

In terms of building social cohesion in their schools, principals were most concerned about students:

- exposed to family violence - 69%
- or affected by mental ill health - 66%.

47% of principals reported a significant increase over the past five years in the proportion of students at their school requiring intervention because of mental health. 23% reported that exposure to family violence had significantly increased over the last five years.

Most principals said the incidence of students experiencing discrimination or harassment from other students had not changed over the last five years.

However, views were mixed, with 21% reporting an increase in race-based discrimination while 26% reported a decrease.

83% of principals think encouraging social cohesion is an important part of their job, with 65% believing their schools was 'very socially cohesive'.

While most principals feel students are supported to have a voice (93%) and have opportunities to express their cultures (87%) – fewer thought 'they made allowances for religious practices or opportunities to express religion (59-63%)'.

Encouragingly, principals report that over the last five years, students had become:

- more likely to be accepting of those perceived to be different to them – 67%
- more likely to help each other out – 65%
- more likely to get on well together – 59%.

Strong connections with parents and school and community events and partnerships were noted as factors that helped generate social cohesion within schools.

84% of principals felt that their school's relevant policies had helped support social cohesion – with 15% claiming the policy had no impact. ■

Source: Leading for social cohesion in Victorian public schools: Final report, September 2020.

