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## NZ schools lead world in bullying

14:43, Jan 31 2009

Three-quarters of primary school children have been bullied in the past month, ranking New Zealand 34th of 35 countries in a major international study.

More evidence of an endemic bullying culture comes as teachers call for law changes to single out the most troublesome students and as the Ministry of Education plans a Behaviour Summit for early next year.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) showed only Tunisia had fewer Year 5 students reporting no instances of bullying over the past month.

Pupils were asked how often the following happened in their school in the past month:

Something of mine was stolen.

I was hit or hurt by other student(s) (for example, shoving, hitting, kicking).

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I was made to do things I didn't want to do by other students.

I was made fun of or called names.

I was left out of activities by other students.

In New Zealand, 33 per cent of children answered yes to three or more of the questions -- far worse than the international average 18%.

A further 42% of pupils said they had suffered one or two of the bullying incidents in the past month.

Only Tunisia rated worse for bullying -- there, 23% of students reported no bullying.

Auckland paediatrician and former Children's Commissioner Ian Hassall said the high rates of bullying reflected a "punitive culture".

"It's not just children who are bullied; adults bully as well," Hassall said. "We do have a punitive society that rather believes in punishing people and threatening them, so it's not surprising that children pick up on this and go punishing one another."

Inquiries into school bullying by the Children's Commissioner and the Human Rights Commission are under way.

Briefing papers to the new Education Minister, Anne Tolley, reveal plans for a Behaviour Summit to be held in March next year.

The papers state that the Ministry of Education is already dealing with 4500 children aged five to 14 who have "the most severe behavioural needs".

"In March 2009, the ministry is planning to bring together the education sector and other stakeholders in a Behaviour Summit to consider the evidence on effective behaviour management and commit to a plan of action," the papers state.

A spokeswoman for Tolley said the conference plan

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was at a "very embryonic stage".

The Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) is backing the planned conference.

In its briefing to Tolley, the PPTA also calls for law changes "to allow for the sharing of information about students with a history of high-risk behaviour that may put members of a school community at risk".

Schools had little information about new students with a history of violence, PPTA president-elect Kate Gainsford said.

"Schools are in the situation where one group of people after another students and staff are set up to find out that there is a person who has come in to their school with very, very high needs," she said.

"The kind of situation that schools often find themselves in is seeking support from agencies that just don't have the capacity and they don't have the ability to respond in a timely manner. It's just not a very accessible set of services, really."

The PPTA plans to single out badly behaved children sounded good but would not work, Hassall said.

"If people think it's going to solve the problem, they're kidding themselves, because it's not about the odd individual," he said.

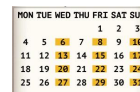
A Behaviour Summit ran the risk of having "people talking to themselves the converted", Hassall said.

"How to get out and beyond that is really the issue."

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