

News

TOO YOUNG - School loses a third of students amid 18 inappropriate incidents

Tanya Chilcott SCHOOLS REPORTER

4 December 2009

[The Courier-Mail](#)

A BRISBANE primary school is embroiled in a "sexualised behaviour" crisis with young boys and girls blamed for a series of disturbing incidents.

Almost a third of students have been withdrawn from the school, on Brisbane's northside, this year as it struggles to cope with the complaints.

The school has recorded 18 cases of sexualised behaviour between children since last year, with 11 cases reported to police. Eight of the 18 alleged incidents have happened this semester.

Experts said children could be copying each other's behaviour.

Education Queensland admits there is a crisis of confidence at the school, where enrolments have plunged.

Queensland Teachers Union members have taken a vote of no confidence in the principal, who is under a separate investigation by the department.

The Courier-Mail revealed earlier this year that two girls had allegedly been sexually assaulted by two year 1 boys in toilets at the school, while a number of girls were allegedly inappropriately touched outside the classroom.

Education Queensland director-general Julie Grantham acknowledged what was happening at the school was "not normal", saying the department was doing everything possible.

Staff had been provided with additional child protection training, teacher aide time had been stepped up in the playground to monitor behaviour and a psychologist had been providing specialised support to children.

Parents would also be addressed by **Family Planning Queensland**.

"We think we have done as much as we can . . . we will do whatever it takes," Ms Grantham said.

"With the sexual assaults - we have done a separate investigation into the full handling of this and the school has followed all the appropriate behaviours."

Only one student has been suspended. None has been expelled.

Griffith University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice professor Stephen Smallbone said children could be influenced by their peers' behaviour.

Ms Grantham would not say how many alleged offenders were involved in the 18 incidents, as it may identify children, and said it was unfair to categorise the incidents as sexual assaults, given the age of those involved.

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<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,,26438147-3102,00.html>

News

Behaviour a copycat syndrome

Tanya Chilcott

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COPYCAT behaviour could be behind the abnormal amount of alleged "sexualised behaviour" incidents at a school on Brisbane's northern outskirts, one expert says.

Griffith University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice Professor Stephen Smallbone said that, if more than one offender was involved, copycat behaviour was "quite plausible".

"It would be unsurprising to me that there might be some peer influences," he said.

"There may be a single instigator for example, or one of the kids might be encouraging others to participate, or others may even participate through a modelling effect, which is really someone else just observing somebody else's behaviour and copying it."

He said sexual behaviour was "regarded as normal" in primary school aged children but some behaviours, including aggressive or persistent actions, were not.

"What becomes not normal or concerning is when there is aggression involved or persistence in the behaviour, despite rejection of those advances or despite adult intervention; pre-occupation with the behaviour, so continuing to be thinking about these things and wanting to do them and generalisation of the problem, which means it might occur across settings and not just single settings."

He warned alleged offenders needed to be treated extremely sensitively as they were unlikely to grow up into adult perpetrators but could have their sexual identity altered if they were made to feel guilty or punished for an action considered normal.

Normal sexualised behaviour included mutual showing of body parts or playful touching, Prof Smallbone said.

Sexual Characteristics in Children and Adolescents

Sexual development is influenced by many factors. When using the traffic lights framework to categorise behaviour, it is necessary to consider the current social, cultural and familial context.

Red

Sexual behaviours that are outside what is considered "normal" behaviour which is excessive, secretive, compulsive, coercive or degrading Indicate a need for immediate intervention and action

Orange

Sexual behaviours that are outside "normal" behaviour in terms of persistence, frequency or inequality in age or developmental abilities Signal the need to take notice and gather information to assess the appropriate action

Green

Sexual behaviours that are normal, considered healthy spontaneous, curious, light hearted, easily distracted, experimentation and equality of age, size and ability levels Provide opportunities to give the child or adolescent positive feedback and information

IDENTIFY, ASSESS and RESPOND

Source: **Family Planning Queensland**