

Learnings and Challenges from the Royal Commission

Implications for the Board's Role in Creating
Child Safe Schools

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As people involved in School Governance

- *What do you know?*
- *What should you know?*
- *How does such knowledge inform the governance, culture and leadership of your School?*
- *What do you need to change?*

What we heard in private sessions

Survivors as at December 2017

Of the 7,981 survivors of abuse we heard about in private sessions:

- 63.6% were male
- 14.9% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 4.2% had disability at the time of the abuse
- the average age at the time of their private session was 52 years
- the average age at the time of first abuse was 10.4 years.

What we heard in private sessions

Duration of abuse, as at May 2017

In private sessions, 74.3% of survivors talked about the duration of the abuse:

Of these:

- 2.2 years on average
- 14.4 % of female victims and 8.9 % of male victims experienced abuse for between 6 and 10 years
- 3.9% of female victims and 1.0% of male victims said the abuse went on for more than 10 years.

Institution management

From private sessions, as at December 2017

Of the **7,981** survivors of abuse we heard from in private sessions:

- **58.1%** of survivors said the abuse took place in an institution managed by a religious organisation
- **32.5%** in a government-run institution
- **10.5%** in a non-government, non-religious institution.

We heard about **3,489** institutions where we were told that child sexual abuse had occurred.

Institution type

Number and proportion of survivors by institution type, from private sessions

Institution type	Number	Proportion (%)
Out-of-home care	3,277	41.1
<i>Out-of-home care: pre-1990</i>	2,809	35.2
<i>Out-of-home care: 1990 onwards</i>	298	3.7
<i>Unknown era</i>	205	2.6
Schools	2,521	31.6
Religious activities	1,162	14.6
Youth detention	639	8.0
Recreation, sports and clubs	482	6.0
Health and allied	221	2.8
Armed forces	105	1.3
Supported accommodation	84	1.1
Family and youth support services	66	0.8
Childcare	41	0.5
Youth employment	23	0.3
Other	295	3.7
Unknown	96	1.2

Role of perpetrators

Of survivors who told us about the role of the perpetrator in private sessions, as at May 2017:

- 32.2% told us they were abused by a person in religious ministry
- 30.1% told us they were abused by a teacher
- 13.7% said they were abused by a residential care worker

Common institutional risks

Organisational leadership and culture shape assumptions, values, beliefs and norms. These influence how to behave when interacting with children and what is considered appropriate.

Risk factors include:

- prioritising the reputation of the institution over the safety and wellbeing of children
- failing to listen to and respect children
- understating the seriousness of allegations and complaints
- hierarchies that create deferential obedience rather than accountability -misplaced loyalty

Common situational risks

Situational risks of abuse arise from:

- unsupervised, one-to-one access to a child
- opportunities to form relationships that involve physical contact and/or emotional closeness.

These risks are normal features of many institutional settings – boarding and day schools, out-of-home care settings, individual tuition, youth camps and sporting activities. Most can be reduced through implementing Child Safe policies and procedures.

Common barriers to disclosure

Some of the **barriers to disclosing** sexual abuse were common in all institutional contexts:

- shame and embarrassment
- fear of not being believed, being discredited or even blamed for the abuse
- threats of violence
- fear of reprisals
- institutional codes of silence or cultures of secrecy.

Institutional barriers to disclosure

Governance and leadership that:

- ▶ prioritises **reputation, prestige or loyalty** to the institution above children's safety
- ▶ features strong personal **relationships** between **adults** within institutions, or conflicts of interest for individuals in institutions.
- ▶ allows **widespread** sexual abuse, physical punishment, violence and retribution.

Common factors across institutions include:

- ▶ not following **policies and procedures**, or not having any in place
- ▶ inadequate **avenues for disclosure** and poor institutional responses to sexual abuse or related behaviours, such as bullying
- ▶ inadequate **recordkeeping** and information sharing.

Supporting disclosure

For children

To support disclosure, children need:

- access to **safe adults**
- **opportunities** to raise and discuss concerns
- **information** about sexual abuse and access to sexual abuse prevention programs
- to learn how to provide **peer support**
- appropriate **tools to communicate** abuse.

And your opinion doesn't matter but your judgement does

Child sexual abuse in schools

Volume 13

Australian schools

The way schools manage risks of child sexual abuse affects all children. In 2016, 3.8 million children enrolled in 9,400 primary and secondary schools.*

- 70.5% of schools were government schools, attended by 65.4% of students
- 29.5% of schools were non-government, attended by 34.6% of students.

Of the non-government schools:

- 62.5% are Catholic
- 37.5 are independent.

**ABS, Schools, Australia, 2016*

Wide range of schools examined

- In private sessions, almost **one-third of all survivors** told us they were sexually abused in a school setting as a child. 71.8% of those said they were abused in religious schools.
- Schools were the subject of **13 case studies** - including government and independent schools, and denominational schools from Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal and Jewish faiths.
- One case study looked at the way seven schools responded to **children with harmful sexual behaviours including three boarding schools**.
- One looked at a school for **children with disability** and another an **indigenous boarding school**.

Common risks in schools

Features of the school environment can influence schools' ability to keep children safe. Such risks are often evident in schools where:

- **leadership, governance and culture** prioritises protecting the school's reputation and financial interests rather than child safety
- poor **complaints and investigation** processes deter leaders and staff from taking effective action, including alerting external authorities
- inadequate **recordkeeping and information sharing** perpetuate risks to other children
- children's **participation and empowerment** is discouraged
- **engagement** with families and communities is limited
- Insufficient attention is paid to **equity and diversity** needs.

Boarding Schools

Common Themes

- Vulnerability of children
- Bullying Culture - Complainants further abused or intimidated by staff and students
- Staff attitudes - tough love, boys will be boys, toughen up, don't do
- Lack of protective trusted adults
- Inadequate staff numbers, training, supervision
- Older students control of dormitories and younger children
- Lack of students support following abuse trauma, throughout investigations and post investigations

Indigenous students

Common themes

- Bullying and racial abuse
- Lack of connectedness to cultural supports
- Confusion as to what is abuse and how to express concerns
- Lack of trust in authorities eg police, child protection
- Lack of parental connectedness to school or hostel
- Early exposure to problematic child sexual behaviours
- Lack of culturally appropriate ,trauma informed supports and services.
- Need for greater staff scrutiny in selection, trauma informed training , abuse education and supervision especially residential workers

Common institutional responses

It has been common for institutions to respond to allegations or disclosures of child sexual abuse in the following ways:

- ▶ dismiss or deny allegations
- ▶ punish victims
- ▶ minimise the abuse
- ▶ fail to report to police
- ▶ provide perpetrators with **continued access** to children and employment
- ▶ adopt ‘**in-house**’ responses guided by internal policies or, in religious institutions, religious laws and principles.

Boards and governance

Many not 'fit for purpose'

Board weaknesses:

- Membership -insufficiently diverse and experienced
- Conflicted motives and loyalties when responding to claims of abuse
- Insufficient feedback loops to know what is happening
- Failure to align values and incentives
- Poor commissioning and use of advice including legal advice
- Lack of training or knowledge of emerging risks.

Making institutions child safe

Not only acting for children but acting in
children's best interest
From boardroom to basement.

Foundations for Safer Institutions

Changes to civil liability laws

Changes to criminal offences and procedures

Reportable Conduct Regimes

Child Safe Communities

Child Safe Standards

Improved information Sharing and Record Keeping

Better therapeutic supports and services

Making institutions child safe

Recommendations for all institutions

Our recommendations for all institutions include:

- implementing **Child Safe Standards**
- improving **regulation and oversight**
- improving the way **complaints and disclosures** about child sexual abuse are handled
- providing workers with **skills and knowledge** to keep children safe
- ensuring the **safety and wellbeing** of children.

Culture, environment and operations

10 Child Safe Standards



Making institutions child safe

Recommendations specific to schools

Some recommendations aim to address specific factors relating to the structure, governance or culture of schools.

- incorporate Child Safe Standards into regulation of schools.
- normalise and regularise conversation, information -a community of knowledge
- reduce bullying
- strengthen teacher registration requirements, training and supports
- improve complaints handling and practices for dealing with problematic child sexual behaviours

Boards and governance

Creating child safe schools

- Governance must be ‘fit for purpose’ - what purpose and in whose interest?
- Boards are ultimately accountable - and should embrace principles based on integrity, legitimacy, transparency, stewardship
- Boards not only influence the culture they are responsible to ensure it is lived throughout the school organisation and community.
- Boards need to know what is going on - What questions to ask
- Boards must understand emerging risks and develop responses

A child safe organisation

Beyond policies and procedures

- A culture that is child focused - Best Interest framework
- A deep understanding by all staff, boards and ‘fit for purpose’ governance arrangements
- A community of knowledge
- Looking through the eyes of the child, parent, carer, staff member, the community - not just compliance audits.

Your School

Some questions for those in governing roles

- ▶ How do your governance arrangements ensure that the best interests of children are your focus? Are the school's values and incentives for 'right' conduct aligned?
- ▶ How do you know what is happening in practice at your school?
- ▶ How does the culture of your school enable a child safe environment- what are the greatest weaknesses that would affect identifying and responding to abuse?
- ▶ Is there a shared community of knowledge in your school that empowers board members, staff, parents and students to understand, identify and respond to abuse?
- ▶ What are emerging risks for students and schools in relation to abuse - is your school well equipped to respond to these challenges?