



Blitz on bully parents

EXCLUSIVE

KATIE ROBERTSON

Social Affairs Reporter

A “PARENT police” team should be set up to investigate bullying mums and dads who attack school principals and teachers.

The controversial proposal comes after a three-year study on the health and wellbeing of 2000 school leaders across the country found they were regularly threatened with violence, with WA principals and teachers among the biggest victims.

Key findings from the study, by Monash University researcher Philip Riley, were obtained by *The Sunday Times* ahead of the report's release.

Dr Riley said each state should create its own independent taskforce with the power to interview teachers, parents and students about offensive behaviour in schools. He said it should have full legal powers and the ability to forward concerns to the police.

Other recommendations in-

clude more training for principals on the emotional aspects of teaching and more mental health support. But Dr Riley said the taskforce should be the priority.

“(This recommendation) is the most urgent: the need to look for the causes, and reduce the levels, of adult-to-adult bullying, threats and actual violence,” the report said.

In WA, 46 per cent of principals said they had been physically assaulted or witnessed violence in schools. And 70 per cent said they had been threatened with violence.

Principals in WA, South Australia and the Northern Territory were the biggest victims.

Dr Riley said most of the threats were from aggressive parents.

WA Primary Principals Association president Stephen Breen said bullying and violence against school staff, especially

principals, were getting to “a ridiculous point”.

“We have a weekly occurrence of people who have been bullied or abused either physically or through Facebook,” he said. “It is disappointing that employers do not take this as seriously as they should.

“There’s a lot of stress out there because of this and it’s negating people’s enthusiasm for the teaching profession.”

He said something needed to be done to combat the violence.

“A review needs to be conducted or a taskforce needs to look at this,” he said. “The teaching profession needs to be protected – they do it for a lot of other professions, such as police.”

State School Teachers Union president Anne Gisborne said the aggression and threats by parents was putting people off the role.

“There is an ageing profile

within the teaching fraternity and there is no doubt that when people are looking at aspiring to school leadership and they see school principals dealing with these difficult people and being threatened, that becomes a barrier to them pursuing that career path,” she said.

WA Secondary Schools Executive Association president Rob Nairn said there was an “alarming trend” of bullying and violence against teachers and principals that needed to be addressed.

Education Department acting deputy director-general Lindsay Hale said no staff member should have to put up with violence.

The 2013 survey on principals’ health and wellbeing will open to school leaders online this week.

>>>katie.robertson@news.com.au