



It's parent rage in school office

Principals bashed in new wave of violence

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SCHOOL principals are being abused, threatened or physically attacked by parents and students who refuse to accept their decisions.

Parents are the worst offenders in bullying and threatening school heads but students are more likely to act on threats, with one in four principals reporting they have been physically assaulted.

A quarter of all principals in primary and secondary schools have been threatened with violence by angry parents this year, up from 19 per cent in 2011.

Violent threats by students jumped from 17 per cent to 24 per cent. The shocking figures have emerged in a survey of 3645 principals and assistant principals conducted by the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education at Australian Catholic University.

Separate serious incident reports collated by the NSW Department of Education and Communities show principals and teachers are bashed or



Sharon Parkes.

threatened regularly by students, parents or intruders with a grudge.

Many teachers and principals under orders to develop a "non-confrontational behaviour management style" have been battling to maintain discipline in schools.

When faced with provocative behaviour and even violence, they are directed to respond calmly to help defuse difficult situations.

The principal of Warners Bay High School at Newcastle, Sharon Parkes, said yesterday some heads were attacked because people "did not like the umpire's decision".

"They react in a violent and

aggressive way. In some cases parents are not understanding the rules and procedures of the school," she said.

Ms Parkes said principals' own surveys showed 49 per cent of school heads reported being the victim of workplace bullying.

"There is an increasing number of parents and students with mental health issues and this is reflected in the way they respond to schools," she said.

"And there has been a change in the status of the teaching profession so that not everyone understands what a difficult task it is."

The 2014 Teachers Health Fund Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey Report found principals and their assistants lacked support to face the growing pressures of increased workloads, public accountability, aggressive parents and violent students.

ACU Associate Professor Philip Riley said the survey showed the personal cost to "these highly dedicated school leaders" was increasingly high.