

Support needed for abused principals: Tasmanian Principals Association

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A RISE in school principals reporting threats and physical abuse shows that additional support is required, according to the Tasmanian Principals Association.

The Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey Report found that a quarter of principals reported being physically abused by students, up from 17.3 per cent from 2013.

A quarter of principals reported that they had received threats of violence from parents, a 6.1 per cent rise from last year, while 30 per cent of principals said they had been bullied at work.

Principals Association president David Raw said the survey, produced annually since 2009 by the Australian Catholic University and the Teachers Health Fund, confirmed what he had already known.

The report surveyed 3675 principals and assistant principals from government, independent and Catholic primary and secondary schools.

“You need to be a special person to be able to do the job,” he said.

“This shows that a lot of the job a principal does is not understood or seen.

“The job has got more complex as society continues to change.”

The report called for the establishment of an independent authority to investigate bullying, harassment and violence among its four recommendations.

It also recommended the introduction of professional support policies, increased professional development opportunities and a review of work practices and resources.

Mr Raw said the current supports for principals had “only just been touched on”.

“It’s the responsibility of the system to provide support for key leaders,” he said.

“It deserves to be a valued profession in the community.”

Mr Raw said the onus was on governments to take steps to address the issues faced by principals.

“With both the state and federal government approach to education funding, you can expect more instances again next year,” he said.

Liz Banks, of the Tasmanian Education Department, said the department took all incidents of inappropriate behaviour in schools “extremely seriously”.

“Schools are a microcosm of wider society, and unfortunately incidents of verbal and physical abuse can sometimes occur in schools and the wider community,” the deputy secretary of Early Years and Schools said.

“Principals in their leadership role are often the people who personally deal with these incidents in schools.”

Ms Banks said the department offered a number of support services for principals, including the principal network support staff in the North, North-West and South.