



Mr Michael Tidball
Secretary
Department of Communities and Justice
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PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

Email: secretary.dcj@dcj.nsw.gov.au
CC: Ms Ann Lambino, Registrar, NSW Coroners Court

DGS24/457 / LEGAL22/2087

Dear Mr Tidball,

I write to advise the Attorney General of the Department of Education's response to the recommendations made by Deputy State Coroner Kennedy under the provisions of section 82 of the *Coroner's Act 2009* in the inquest into the death of **SG [REDACTED]**. Adopting the Deputy Coroner's numbering, please see the Department's response to each recommendation.

Coroner's recommendation	Department's response
To the Department of Education (DOE):	
1. That the DOE implements a policy to ensure that a copy of any prior child protection history is accessed by school counsellors at the time of, or shortly after, meeting with suicidal students so that an assessment of cumulative trauma and post-traumatic stress can be more accurately obtained at the time of presentation to a counsellor.	<p>Child Wellbeing and Mental Health Services will be trialling a process that will allow school counselling staff to have information about prior child protection history for students presenting with suicidality.</p> <p>School counselling staff will complete an online form to request child protection information from the Education Child Wellbeing Unit.</p> <p>The process will be trialled in four school counselling teams: a metropolitan, regional, rural team as well as the department's School Counselling and Telepsychology Rural and Remote School (SCATRRS) Counselling Team.</p> <p>The trial process will commence during March 2024.</p>
2. That the DOE undertake a comprehensive review of current policies across all schools and implement a clear suicide and wellbeing policy, ensuring that the policy considers the following: a. the mandatory delivery of a suicide prevention or safety plan for all students reporting suicide attempts	<p>The student health and mental wellbeing policy is under review and will be updated for release by August 2024.</p> <p>The Department's Guidelines for responding to the death of a student by suicide, will be reviewed under this and become mandatory procedures for schools by August 2024.</p>

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<p>be implemented as soon as possible after a suicide attempt;</p> <p>b. If a safety plan is not developed or implemented for any reason, the reasons for this decision are documented and signed off jointly by the school principal and school counsellor, and parents/carers and other agencies (if involved) are informed;</p> <p>c. a mandatory checklist be developed to ensure all school staff are clear on the precise steps required, and the allocation of roles and responsibilities when there is a suicide attempt;</p> <p>d. Provide information and adequate resources to provide immediate support to staff, parents and students in the event of suicide attempts or suicidal behaviour;</p> <p>e. Ensure that steps required under the policies of the DOE are enacted at the local level;</p> <p>f. Implement a mandated and automatic system for follow-up by school counsellors, which is not dependent upon individual capacity or memory; and</p> <p>g. Implement an additional level of oversight for when a mandatory report or e-referral to DCJ is sent to the principal and deputy principal which does not permit human error to allow the child or young person to be unsupported.</p>	<p>Procedures for schools in responding to self-harm and suicidal behaviour are under development and will be available by 2025. The Department has engaged the Black Dog Institute to undertake a literature review to inform this work.</p> <p>The Department has commenced its review of the current advice to the School Counselling Service on "The Management of suicidality and Self Harm". An update will be made available by 2025.</p> <p>Current IT systems do not enable an automated system to be established in line with parts (f) and (g), however the procedures outlined above will strengthen safeguards and enhance reporting and planning following any mandatory report.</p>
<p>3. That an education and training package be delivered to school staff (including principals, deputy principals, teachers and school counsellors) to ensure policies relating to student wellbeing and suicide at a local and state level are being followed; and provide comprehensive and practical training on responding to a suicide attempt or suicidal behaviours.</p>	<p>The Department is currently reviewing the Student Wellbeing Framework. The Student Welfare policy is being rescinded and replaced with a Student Health and Wellbeing Policy in Term 2, 2025. Policy monitoring will occur through operations and policy level.</p> <p>Guidelines for schools in responding to self-harm and suicidal behaviour are being developed and will be available in 2025. These guidelines will be supported by a professional learning package for relevant</p>

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	<p>school staff and available for delivery during 2025.</p> <p>Further, the Department's Child Wellbeing and Mental Health Services has devised a series of reorientation activities for the School Counselling Service workforce based on the <i>Management of Suicidality – Advice for School Counselling Staff</i> procedures. These aim to enhance the application of therapeutic skills related to suicide risk assessment and collaborative safety planning.</p> <p>Child Wellbeing and Mental Health Services will also initiate a review into the <i>Management of Suicidality – Advice for School Counselling Staff</i> to incorporate the latest best practice evidence. This will be completed by the end of 2024.</p>
<p>Jointly to the Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Department of Education and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Hunter New England Local Health District:</p>	
<p>4. Consideration be given to developing a joint agreement between the Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Department of Education and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Hunter New England Local Health District, so as to ensure cooperation, coordination, communication and information sharing takes places in an appropriate and timely manner in accordance with the provisions available under Chapter 16A of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, to ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Records and information are shared between the agencies, as appropriate, when a report is made regarding a child or young person; b. Where an agency relies on the involvement of an external agency in a decision making process, then each agency must notify the external agency if no further action is to be taken by their staff; and <p>The agencies must implement a memorandum of understanding or policy</p>	<p>The lead agency is NSW Health.</p> <p>Representatives from identified agencies held an initial meeting on the 21 February 2024 to commence work on this recommendation. A working group will be established to progress.</p>

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to mandate that staff follow up with counterparts at the other agencies so that appropriate action for the young person occurs.	
Jointly to the NSW Department of Education and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Hunter New England Local Health District:	
<p>5. That an education package is developed by the above agencies to provide to parents and carers of children or young people who have attempted suicide or expressed suicidal behaviour. The package is to provide guidance in relation to dealing with suicide attempts, suicidal behaviour, initiating appropriate conversations with young people in relation to same, and general suicide and wellbeing education for parents, particularly around the possibility of any further attempts of suicide and risk factors. Such a package should be provided to parents following a report to a school counsellor or a referral to CAHMS about such behaviours.</p>	<p>DOE has commenced working with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Hunter New England Local Health District and Ministry of Health to develop an education package to provide to parents and carers of children or young people who have attempted suicide or expressed suicidal behaviour.</p> <p>Resources are currently being drafted.</p>

I take this opportunity to express my condolences to **SG** family for their tragic loss. I would also thank the Deputy State Coroner for her findings and recommendations which, as she observed, might assist in improving communication, especially to those special vulnerable children when they are brave enough to speak out and share their struggles.

Yours sincerely



Murat Dizdar
SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
 26 March 2024

