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MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

E&OE TRANSCRIPT

DOORSTOP

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SUBJECTS: School bullying, Social media ban, Education Ministers Meeting in Queensland, Anti-Bullying Rapid Review.

JASON CLARE, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: Thanks very much for coming along this morning. A couple of years ago we banned mobile phones in schools and we're seeing the impact that they're having, kids are more focussed in the classroom, kids are also having more fun in the playground, they're playing with their mates rather than staring at their phone.

But when three o'clock comes the phone gets handed back or gets out of the bag and kids dive back in to the cesspit of social media. You can see that if you look at school students at bus stops around the country while they're waiting to get the bus back home, and that's why the action that the Government is taking to ban, to restrict access to social media for young people under the age of 16 is so important.

Education Ministers will meet on Friday in Queensland, and at that meeting we'll be briefed by Anika Wells, the Communications Minister, as well as Julie Inman Grant, the eSafety Commissioner, on the work that they're doing, the preparations that they are making ahead of the implementation of this ban on the 10th of December. It's important that they brief Education Ministers because it's important that we're able to help schools prepare for this big change.

It's not the only thing that we need to do, and on Friday Education Ministers are also going to consider a report about the work that we need to do to help keep our kids safe at school from bullying. Bullying isn't just push and shove in the playground or stealing someone else's lunch money, it looks a lot different today than what it looked like back when we were at school. A big part of that is because of social media and because of the internet.

Nowadays the bully can follow you all the way home, and back into your home, and bully you on the phone or on the iPad in front of everybody, day and night. Bullying online means that everybody can see it, that you can feel like you can never escape it. It helps to explain some of the most tragic and heart wrenching examples that the people who have done this review have seen and heard from mums and dads whose children have taken their own lives because of it.

The evidence that we're seeing tells us that about one in four young people tell us they've been bullied in the last few weeks at school or by school friends, that about one in two young people have been bullied online, and terrifyingly that 13 per cent of young people tell us that that online bullying involves someone telling them to kill themselves.

The eSafety Commissioner tells us there's been a 450 per cent increase in the number of complaints to her about online bullying. This is getting worse, not better, and it needs action. It's a national problem, it needs a national response.

That's why earlier this year I appointed two individuals, Charlotte Keating and Jo Robinson, to lead work on a National Plan and that's what I'll present to Education Ministers to consider when we meet on Friday.

Happy to take some questions.

JOURNALIST: You mentioned bullying isn't just about pushing and shoving, have you seen the numbers go down since social media was a thing?

CLARE: I've seen reports that tell us that bullying in the playground is a bit less but bullying online is a lot more. This is complex, this is hard. What parents are telling us is that a big part of the problem is schools not acting fast enough, that the sooner you can nip it in the bud the better.

What teachers are telling us is, "We need more support, we need more tools, we need more resources, we need more training". So, these are all the sorts of things that we'll consider as part of this report.

JOURNALIST: What training do teachers currently have to identify this behaviour in school?

CLARE: Yeah, I won't pre empt what's in the report because we'll hand that down later this week, but there are some great programs that are implemented in schools right across the country. What we want to do is find the best and apply it right across the country.

JOURNALIST: I just wanted to ask you about the Instagram PG-13 ratings, would that help bullying in any way?

CLARE: Well look, what that shows is that the big tech companies can act to protect our kids if they want to, and the acid needs to be put on them to make sure that this ban on access to social media works. There are always going to be young people that get around it or attempt to get around it. There are young people that get access to alcohol today even though you're not supposed to drink alcohol until you're 18. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't have laws to stop people selling alcohol to young people. I don't expect this to be perfect, but I do expect it to make a difference and help to keep our kids safe, help to keep most of our kids out of the cesspit of social media. All the pressure is on parents at the moment, that are trying to get their kids out of this. The pressure needs to be put on companies like Instagram and all the other social media companies to help us out, help parents out, help our kids out.

JOURNALIST: And will you be training parents as well when it comes to identifying this behaviour?

CLARE: You mean on bullying or do you mean on social media?

JOURNALIST: On bullying.

CLARE: So just on social media, we're not putting any responsibility on the parents here. The responsibility is on to Instagram and on to X and on to all of these social media companies that are providing social media access to young people right now.

In terms of bullying, parents are telling us, I guess, two things. They're worried when their child walks through the school gate that they're going to get bullied and they want to know what they can do to help protect their children, what they can do when their child tells them that they've been bullied by somebody else at school or online.

There are some parents that are also telling us, "If I get a phone call from the school and they tell me that my child, my son or my daughter is the bully, what do I do to change their behaviour to make sure that it stops?"

The people that have led this review for us have spoken to about 1,700 people across the country who have made submissions, they're mums, they're dads, they're teachers, they're students too. They've sat down and they've spoken to mums and dads who have lost their kids because they've taken their life because the bullying seemed inescapable.

And those mums and dads are telling them and they're telling us that we've got to act quickly to nip this in the bud.

JOURNALIST: And just lastly, the report comes out by the end of the week but what sort of ages are most affected by both social media and by the pushing and shoving type of bullying?

CLARE: Well, it's all ages. It's primary school, it's high school. There was a report on the weekend that made the point that you see this happening as young as 10, sometimes even younger, you know. I know from personal experience, not as a Minister, that this can happen really young.

What's important is that children know what it is, can call it out, are not afraid to tell the teacher to tell the principal and that schools know what to do and act quickly. That's what's important here. That's what this report is all about; making sure that we take national action and make sure that we set a standard that's applied in every schoolyard.

Chloe.

JOURNALIST: Thank you, Minister. Obviously quite a lot covered there, I just wanted to ask you about Meta's new PG-13 settings on Instagram. Do settings like that mean that the social media age ban is still warranted?

CLARE: Oh absolutely. Remember this ban is for young people under the age of 16. What this shows is that all of the claims by the companies that this is all too hard and won't work and they can't do anything is wrong, that they can. They just have chosen not to until this Government has put the pressure on them.

We're doing this for a reason. Mums and dads across the country have told us they're worried about their kids and what's happening to them because of social media, because of the poison of social media, because of this cesspit that too many of our kids fall into and the impact that it's having on their mental health.

It's what young people are telling me as well. As Education Minister I'm in schools all the time. I've spoken to a lot of young people, 16 and 17, who tell me, "I wish this was in place earlier".

But social media looks different today than it did even two or three years ago, that the algorithms mean that you just get fed the same stuff all the time and that you get sent down this rabbit hole that you feel like you can't get out of. That's why we're doing this.

I said a moment ago we're not expecting that things are going to be perfect, but we are expecting that this is going to help a lot of young people right across the country. And we're not putting pressure on mums and dads to be the police of all of this, we're expecting companies like Instagram, we're expecting companies like Meta, to do their job and be part of the solution here, to help keep our kids safe.

JOURNALIST: Considering the timing though do you think that Meta's rolling out these PG-13 settings to hopefully try and get out of the age ban?

CLARE: I don't know about that. I think they've made comments about things like this a couple of months ago as well. There's no getting out of it. This legislation has been passed. It's being implemented on the 10th of December, and we want them to implement it and to deactivate the accounts of people under the age of 16.

They've got to be part of the solution here, and that means implementing this legislation.

JOURNALIST: Just finally, Minister, on the bullying report that's coming out, you know, once that's put into motion, how will you measure the success in reducing bullying?

CLARE: Well, the big part of success here is making sure that we turn words into action, that what is in this plan is properly implemented. And that's the hard part, you know. We know how big a problem this is. The hard part is making sure that the standard we set is applied in every school across the country, whether it's primary schools or high schools, whether it's public schools or private schools.

And so, what I'm hoping on Friday is that Ministers agree to the recommendations in this report and that we agree to develop an implementation plan to see it implemented across the country.

JOURNALIST: That's all for me, thank you, Minister.

CLARE: Thank you. We've got one more.

JOURNALIST: What would make the state Ministers not agree? Is there anything in the report that they

CLARE: I've got a lot of confidence that they'll agree. State Ministers, like me, see this all the time. They know how serious this is. Sorry, they know how serious this is and how important it is that we act. And this is not a report that is going to take them by surprise because they've worked very closely with Jo Robinson and Charlotte Keating, the authors of this report, and so Friday when we meet to discuss this report, it's an opportunity for us to comb through the recommendations and then make a decision about implementing it right across the country.

Thanks guys.

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