Department of Education

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Ella George MP
Chair, Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee
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Dear Ms George

Thank you for your correspondence of 19 December 2025 regarding *Questions on notice – Inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups.*

Child safety is a key priority for the Department of Education (the department). The department is committed to protecting all children and young people and upholding the rights of every child under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. Victoria's commitment to child safety is demonstrated through the framework of the Child Safe Standards made under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*.

The department's PROTECT website provides guidance for all Victorian schools to identify and respond to child abuse and provide ongoing support. The guidance supports school staff to identify the signs and indicators of abuse and respond based on the source of the abuse. The PROTECT guidance enables schools to help students and their families to get the right support at the right time including assistance available through the school, referring students and their families to specialist services, or reporting to authorities for further investigation.

The department's Respectful Relationships initiative supports schools to embed a culture of respect and gender equality across the entire school community. Over 2,000 Victorian government, Catholic and independent schools are signed on to the Respectful Relationships whole school approach. This includes all government schools, meeting the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendation. The department's 25 Respectful Relationships regional Project Leads support schools to implement the whole school approach. This includes the delivery of Respectful Relationships education via the Victorian Curriculum, and 17 Respectful Relationships Liaison Officers supporting schools to identify and respond to family violence.

A range of education workforces including centre-based education and care services, all Victorian schools, and education health and wellbeing workforces are prescribed as Information Sharing Entities and Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework organisations.

To help schools meet their MARAM responses, the department requires principals to identify 2 to 3 MARAM-nominated staff who are responsible for family violence screening, safety planning and making referrals and reports. These staff are supported with MARAM-nominated staff training delivered by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.

Please find attached the department's comprehensive responses to the questions on notice.

If you would like further information, please contact Claire Tobin, Executive Director, Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division, Department of Education, on ███████ or by email, ████████████████████

Yours sincerely

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Tony Bates PSM
Secretary
20/02/2026

Encl.

Questions on Notice – Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee

Mandatory reporting and intervention

1. **The Committee is aware that most reports to Child Protection stem from education and health settings. What evidence or data does the Department have regarding mandatory reporters in the education sector making referrals to Child Protection where children or young people are at risk due to association with a high-control coercive group? For example, the number/volume of referrals, and who the report was made by (i.e., a teacher, wellbeing staff, a volunteer, or school leadership).**

Data on referrals to Child Protection, including referral volumes and referrer roles, is collected and held by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH). DFFH is the statutory authority responsible for child protection intake, assessment, investigation, and data collection. The Department of Education (the department) is not responsible for collecting data relating to referrals to Child Protection.

For further detail please refer to the DFFH portfolio response submitted to the Committee.

2. **What evidence or data does the Department have regarding disclosures made by children or young people to mandatory reporters in the education sector relating to conduct or harms within a high-control or cultic setting? For example, the number/volume of disclosures, and who the disclosure was made to (i.e., a teacher, wellbeing staff, a volunteer, or school leadership).**

Data on referrals to Child Protection, including referral volumes and referrer roles, is collected and held by DFFH. DFFH is the statutory authority responsible for Child Protection intake, assessment, investigation, and data collection.

The department provides guidance to schools on how to identify and respond to all forms of child abuse and harm through its PROTECT guidance. As part of this guidance, all school staff are supported to recognise the observable physical or behavioural indicators of child abuse.

School staff must follow the Four Critical Actions as soon as they witness an incident, receive a disclosure, or form a reasonable belief that a child has been abused or is at risk of being abused. The Four Critical Actions outline to whom an incident, disclosure or suspicion should be reported.

2a. **Are there regular reviews to monitor how often children use these trusted relationships to come forward, and to assess whether the approach is effective in reaching children in coercive or isolating environments?**

Ministerial Order 1359 and Child Safe Standard 10 require schools to regularly review and improve child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices. Schools must review and evaluate these practices after any significant child safety incident, or at least every 2 years.

Schools must analyse complaints, concerns, and safety incidents to identify causes and systemic failures and inform continuous improvement. Schools must also report on the outcomes of relevant reviews to staff, students, families, and the school community.

3. What training or education is currently required for teachers (including student teachers) to help them recognise when a child may be living in a high control coercive group environment?

All Victorian schools are required to comply with the Child Safe Standards, which are compulsory minimum standards to ensure that organisations that deliver services to children and young people are well prepared to protect them from abuse.

The department provides a range of resources to schools and early childhood education providers to help protect children from harm. The PROTECT website contains guidance for all school staff on identifying and responding to child abuse, and providing ongoing support to children who have experienced abuse. The department also provides tools and guidance to support all Victorian schools to identify and respond to family violence, including coercive control, including tools that help all staff to identify family violence and nominated school staff to screen for family violence and make basic safety plans for students.

The department's Respectful Relationships regional workforce delivers education to Respectful Relationships schools, including training on identifying and responding to family violence - that includes content on coercive control - to all school staff. This workforce also delivers Respectful Relationships induction sessions to school staff, supporting staff to understand the impact and prevalence of family violence and the gendered drivers of family violence.

The department has engaged the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare to deliver MARAM training to education workforces. This training supports staff to understand their responsibilities under MARAM, how to identify and respond to family violence, and how to use the department's MARAM tools to identify and respond to family violence.

Training and education available to support this includes:

- Child Safe Standards - compulsory training presentations for staff, volunteers, and school councils. This training includes an overview of the 11 Child Safe Standards schools need to implement

- Protecting children – Mandatory reporting and other obligations e-learning module, which supports school staff to understand their reporting and legal obligations and how to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Mandatory reporters are required to complete this training once a year

- Resources to support staff to identify inappropriate staff conduct, including grooming. Case studies can be used in all-staff or sub-school team meetings, for example, to help staff understand how to identify potential grooming behaviours and the steps they need to take to report concerning behaviours

- Identifying and responding to family violence training delivered by the Respectful Relationships regional workforce to all school staff

- Induction sessions for school staff delivered by the Respectful Relationships workforce support staff to understand the impact and prevalence of family violence and the gendered drivers of family violence.

- MARAM-nominated staff training to support nominated staff to screen for family violence and make basic safety plans, delivered by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

3a. **Given that mandatory reporting is taught in teacher education programs, what opportunities exist to incorporate awareness of high control coercive environments into this training or ongoing professional development?**

The department's PROTECT guidance and training resources are designed to apply to all forms of harm and child abuse. This approach supports school staff to respond to concerns based on observable physical and behavioural indicators.

Ongoing professional learning in schools reinforces this approach. This includes use of PROTECT guidance, training resources, and locally delivered professional learning. These opportunities support staff to build and refresh understanding within the existing child safety framework.

4. **What support or guidance is available for educators who have concerns for children and young people in high-control coercive groups, but may not know how to report or intervene?**

All Victorian schools are required to comply with the Child Safe Standards, which are compulsory minimum standards to ensure that organisations that deliver services to children and young people are well prepared to protect them from abuse.

Child Safe Standard 2 ensures that child safety and wellbeing are embedded in school leadership, governance, and culture. Schools must take deliberate steps to promote child safety and wellbeing and protect children by

- Embedding and promoting a child safety culture at all levels of the organisation
- School leaders actively modelling such a culture
- Ensuring transparent governance arrangements

Child Safe Standard 3 empowers children and young people to understand their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and know that they will be taken seriously.

Schools must also provide families and communities with accessible information about their child safe policies and practices and involve them in the approach to child safety and wellbeing as highlighted in Child Safe Standard 4.

The department provides a range of resources to schools and early childhood education providers to help protect children from harm The PROTECT website contains guidance for all school staff on identifying and responding to child abuse and providing ongoing support to children who have experienced abuse.

Key resources available to schools include the Child Safe Standards action list for government schools, which outlines minimum compliance requirements for each standard. Schools also have access to template child safety and wellbeing policies, a Child Safety Code of Conduct, and child safety risk management tools through the School Policy Templates Portal via the department's Policy and Advisory Library. Schools may nominate a child safety champion, supported by dedicated guidance, to provide leadership and advice to staff responding to child safety concerns.

5. **When schools encounter families whose decision-making or engagement is heavily influenced by a central leader, belief system, or closed community, how is that incorporated into case planning or risk assessment processes?**

5a. **The Committee has heard that some families connected to high-control groups may avoid contact with schools or decline support services. How does the Department respond when parents are unwilling to participate in attendance plans, wellbeing assessments, or re-engagement strategies?**

5b. **What indicators or early warning systems does the Department use to identify children who are at risk of disengaging from education? How do these indicators or early warning systems account for, or adapt to, situations where disengagement is linked to family involvement in a high-control or closed community?**

The department and schools recognise that timely identification and support for young people showing signs of disengagement is critical to ensuring they remain connected to school, engaged and attending fully.

The department's Schools Guide to Attendance supports schools to identify early warning signs of student disengagement and ensure every disengaged student is identified, contacted, and supported to re-engage.

Attendance dashboards enable schools to identify students who are at risk of disengaging from education and/or are leaving school early, and to consider appropriate supports to re-engage them back into education.

The department has also developed a Staying in Education Dashboard - an interactive online dashboard to help schools to identify students in from Years 4 to 12 who are at risk of disengaging from education and leaving school early. This early identification provides school wellbeing teams with the opportunity to implement a range of interventions and supports to ensure vulnerable young people maintain their engagement and connection with education before the critical transition to senior secondary years.

Support for students at risk of disengagement

Schools are advised that strategies to support students showing signs of disengagement should be explored via a Student Support Group which includes the student, their family, and a range of staff involved with the student. If a principal feels that they have exhausted strategies for addressing student attendance and engagement concerns, they should consult with their department area team to discuss the individual student and the next steps.

The department's Transition policy, guidance and resources supports students through the transition process from Year 5 through Year 8. This includes practical strategies that schools can implement to provide at-risk students with tiered support, and best practice case studies from Victorian schools.

The guidance supports schools to involve students in their own transition experience, as students feel better supported and more empowered when they can participate in transition decision-making and co-design transition programs. Transition programs are also better tailored and more effective when students help shape them. This is especially important for students who may be at higher risk of a poor transition, including students at risk of disengaging.

Victoria has a range of supports in place for students experiencing mental health, wellbeing concerns, and issues with engagement and attendance. Mental health and wellbeing support across the system is tailored based on student need. The Map of Key Mental Health and Wellbeing Support shows these based on a framework of multi-tiered systems of support – universal interventions that provide a foundation for all students, early intervention, and cohort-specific support for students with greater need and targeted support for individual students with the most intensive needs. The

department's health, wellbeing, and inclusion workforces support schools with a range of prevention, early intervention, response, and critical incident supports.

Where students are experiencing long-term disengagement, the department delivers the Navigator Program, which supports students aged 12 to 17 to re-engage with education. Navigator staff work one-on-one with young people as well as their families and schools to provide students with the specific support they need. This includes connecting students to supports to address underlying barriers to learning and supporting the young person's pathway back to regular attendance and engagement in learning.

Expectations of schools to follow up students who have disengaged

The department advises schools that if a student has 5 consecutive days of unexplained absence, and after attempts to engage with their parent/carer and their designated emergency contact(s) they can still not be located, the school should consider the following:

- contacting their department Area's Health Wellbeing and Specialist Services branch to discuss the individual student circumstances and what actions to take next

- requesting an enrolment check via the Victorian Student Register (a secure database managed by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority) to confirm that they have not enrolled into another Victorian school or registered for home schooling

- contacting the local police to request that they conduct a welfare check

- requesting information from an external support service that the student is engaged with using the Child Information Sharing Scheme, provided that the service is an Information Sharing Entity in Victoria

- submitting a whereabouts unknown referral to the School Attendance Officer for further investigation. Area teams must record all steps taken to locate a student in the department's Attendance and Referral Management System.

Schools should continue all attempts to locate a student whose whereabouts is unknown to ensure their safety and to meet their obligation for ensuring the engagement of all students enrolled in their school.

5C. How does the Department maintain oversight of children transitioning to home-schooling or flexible learning environments, particularly where withdrawal may reflect avoidance of oversight rather than a genuine educational preference?

Mandatory reporting obligations require school staff to make a report if they have reasonable grounds to believe that a child being removed from school to attend home schooling or another flexible setting is at risk of abuse or harm.

Any registered school, including within a flexible learning environment, must comply with Child Safe Standards and mandatory reporting obligations of staff in these settings would continue to apply.

Neither the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (the Act) nor the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 require the department to maintain direct oversight of students who have been registered for home schooling.

Under the Act, home schooling during a child's compulsory school years (ages 6 to 17) is a recognised alternative to mainstream schooling. Parents wishing to home school their child must apply for registration with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and ensure the child remains enrolled in and attending school until the registration is approved.

Parents who elect to home school assume responsibility for the planning, delivery, and assessment of their child's education. Requirements include ensuring that the student receives regular and efficient instruction that substantially addresses the learning areas set out in the Act and is consistent with the principles and practice of Australian democracy.

The VRQA is responsible for regulating home schooling in Victoria. This includes assessing applications for home schooling registration and conducting annual reviews of selected home-schooling families to ensure requirements are being met.

Referral of a student to a Flexible Learning Option

The referral of a student to a Flexible Learning Option (FLO) must always be agreed between the referring school, the student, their parent/carer, the FLO host school (and if required, the region), and must first and foremost consider the best interests of the young person.

6. **Stakeholders raised that children in high-control coercive settings may experience non-physical forms of harm that are difficult to detect. How are existing guidelines or training modules for mandatory reporters in the education sector adequate to help mandatory reporters to recognise signs of coercive control, ideological indoctrination, or psychological isolation, such as the Child Safety Manual or screening tools for mental health early intervention?**

6a. **If they are not adequate, which existing child-safety or welfare frameworks could be extended to include this kind of guidance to ensure mandatory reporters in the educations sector are equipped to identify and respond to these kinds of harm?**

6b. **What measures are in place to ensure mandatory reporters in the education sector feel safe and supported to report relating to a child's involvement in a coercive high-control group, especially when there may be reputational or community pressures against disclosure?**

The department's PROTECT guidance and training resources are designed to apply to all forms of harm and child abuse. This approach supports school staff to respond to concerns based on observable physical and behavioural indicators.

Key resources available to schools include the Child Safe Standards action list for government schools, which outlines minimum compliance requirements for each standard. Schools also have access to template child safety and wellbeing policies, a Child Safety Code of Conduct, and child safety risk management tools through the School Policy Templates Portal via the Department's Policy and Advisory Library. Schools may nominate a child safety champion, supported by dedicated guidance, to provide leadership and advice to staff responding to child safety concerns.

7. **Under Department policy, certain persons are mandatory reporters who must report to child protection or police when they form a 'reasonable belief' of harm. How does the Department advise mandatory reporters to assess 'reasonable belief' when evidence may be subtle or accumulates over time rather than stemming from a singular incident?**

7a. Evidence to the Committee suggests that families involved with coercive high-control groups may present well externally, making risk difficult to assess. How does the Department support mandatory reporters to identify concealed harm in these circumstances, where traditional markers of concern may be absent, and to distinguish between genuinely low-risk situations and coercive high-control situations?

The department's PROTECT guidance and training resources are designed to apply to all forms of harm and child abuse. This approach supports school staff to respond to concerns based on observable physical and behavioural indicators. Schools must follow the department's Four Critical Actions for Schools to respond to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse.

This guidance also includes how to approach The Orange Door who can further assess the level of risk to a student.

The department is refreshing the PROTECT guidance to be clearer about reporting and referral pathways and ways for schools and their staff to support students. This is due to be launched in early 2026.

Broader capability and policy

8. How does the Department view the effectiveness of Victoria's current child safety and wellbeing frameworks in recognising risks associated with high-control, closed or cult-like environments?

8a. How might clearer definitions or risk categories assist in identifying and responding to these situations?

8b. In what ways could specialised capability or training enhance effectiveness in this area?

8c. What barriers to reporting by educators, regarding children involved in high-control/insular organisations, is the Department aware of?

8d. What reforms, if any, would enhance the Department's ability to identify and respond to children in high-control or cult-like environments?

Schools have well-developed frameworks to support child safety and wellbeing and respond to suspected incidents of abuse.

The department provides a range of resources to schools and early childhood education providers to help protect children from harm. The PROTECT website contains guidance for all school staff on identifying and responding to child abuse and providing ongoing support to children who have experienced abuse.

The department's PROTECT guidance and training resources are designed to apply to all forms of harm and child abuse. This approach supports school staff to respond to concerns based on observable physical and behavioural indicators.

The department is refreshing the PROTECT guidance to be clearer about reporting and referral pathways and ways for schools and their staff to support students. This is due to be launched in early 2026.

9. **What recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission) does the Department consider particularly relevant to schools in preventing harm in highly insular groups, and that Victoria has not fully realised in practice?**

Recommendation 8.6 recommended that the Australian Government and state and territory governments should make nationally consistent legislative and administrative arrangements, in each jurisdiction, for a specified range of bodies (prescribed bodies) to share information related to the safety and wellbeing of children, including information relevant to child sexual abuse in institutional contexts (relevant information). These arrangements should be made to establish an information exchange scheme to operate in and across Australian jurisdictions. Phase 2 of the Child Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme commenced in April 2021. The schemes enable universal services, specialist services, health, education, and justice services, such as schools, public hospitals, and courts, to share information with each other related to the wellbeing of a child or a group of children.

Recommendation 13.7 recommended that state and territory governments should provide nationally consistent and easily accessible guidance to teachers and principals on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse in all government and non-government schools. The department provides a package of resources through the PROTECT website to schools to support the prevention of and response to abuse. The department is refreshing the PROTECT guidance to be clearer about reporting and referral pathways and ways for schools and their staff to support students. This is due to be launched in early 2026.

The department considers that these are the most relevant department-led recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence to preventing harm in highly insular groups. Both recommendations have been implemented, and work is ongoing to keep guidance updated and continue embedding practice change.

9a. **Reflecting on the Royal Commission, how has the implementation of the recommendations in schools been audited or measured for compliance?**

9b. **How is the Department undertaking continuous improvement through evaluation or expansion of lessons learnt from the Royal Commission?**

The department continuously monitors the effectiveness of its policy offering and the appropriateness of its systems. This is monitored through feedback received from:

- children and young people in relation to usefulness and clarity of information provided
- school principals and staff in relation to the usefulness and clarity of information provided, including information sessions to schools and surveys following sessions
- feedback loops across relevant department divisions
- regular reflection and review sessions
- in relation to sexual harm matters, insights from the Sexual Harm Response Unit, who also work closely with victim-survivors of sexual abuse.

The department established the Child Safety Committee in June 2024. This Committee provides assurance to the Executive Board of the department that the department has a comprehensive child

safety governance framework in place. The Committee provides strategic oversight of the department's child safety policies, guidance, capability, practice, and compliance obligations. This includes providing strategic oversight of child safety policy for the department, schools, and early childhood education and care services, and identifying key child safety risks and monitoring progress to prevent and minimise risk through agreed measures. Committee meetings are scheduled quarterly or at the request of the Chair.

10. **Action 3 from the Four Critical Actions on reporting child abuse in schools involves contacting parents and carers to notify them if it is suspected their child is a victim of abuse, unless advised otherwise by Victoria Police or Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Given the risk that parents or carers may themselves be involved in/supportive of a coercive high-control group, under what circumstances do relevant authorities advise schools not to contact parents or carers following a disclosure?**

Action 2 of the Four Critical Actions on reporting child abuse in schools is to report to authorities and referring to services. As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, school staff must report all incidents, suspicions, and disclosure of child abuse as soon as practicable. The principal must consult with Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers.

If there is a belief that a child is not subject to abuse, but there are still significant concerns for their wellbeing, school staff must still act. This may include making a report or referral to, or seeking advice from:

- The Orange Door
- Safe and Equal – for information and guidance to help respond to family violence
- family violence victim-survivors can be referred to 1800 Respect for counselling, information, and a referral service – 1800 737 732
- Child Protection
- Victoria Police — 000 or the local police station.

10a. **In what instances have education providers informed parents or carers of child-safety concerns that may have been linked to their involvement in a high-control or cult-like group contrary to Department/police advice? And, what was the response?**

The [Managing and Reporting School Incidents (including Emergencies) policy](#) describes the requirements for managing and reporting school incidents, including emergencies. A reportable incident is anything that impacts the health safety or wellbeing of a student, regardless of where the incident occurred. While the department would take a report related to child safety concerns linked to involvement in a high-control or cult-like group, the matter is not identified specifically in a category that is searchable within the department's systems.

11. **When there are general wellbeing concerns about a child (not child abuse), what process do education providers follow to decide whether to involve/advise parents or carers, particularly**

in situations where the family may be linked to a coercive high-control group that could be contributing to the wellbeing concern?

The department's PROTECT guidance and training resources are designed to apply to all forms of harm and child abuse. This approach supports school staff to respond to concerns based on observable physical and behavioural indicators. The department is refreshing the PROTECT guidance to be clearer about reporting and referral pathways and ways for schools and their staff to support students. This is due to be launched in early 2026.

School staff have a duty of care in relation to students. Principals, teachers, and other staff working with students must take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm.

The department provides policies and guidance relating to the health, safety and wellbeing of students to support school staff to meet their duty of care. Schools also have their own local policies that support staff to meet their duty of care, such as health policies, bullying prevention policies, yard duty and supervision policies, student wellbeing policies, and child safety policies. Principals must have in place good systems to ensure the full and proper implementation of policies by all staff, as a reasonable step to prevent foreseeable harm.

Critical Action 4 outlines actions that schools must take, where deemed appropriate, to support students who are impacted by child abuse.

12. **How effective are the current arrangements, such as Child FIRST/Orange Door, for responding to other wellbeing concerns which do not appear to be the result of child abuse?**

12a How equipped is the system for responding to harms that are experienced by children and young people due to high-control coercive groups?

DFFH is the statutory authority responsible for child protection intake, assessment, investigation, and data collection. DFFH is responsible for overseeing The Orange Door's Service delivery.

For further detail, please refer to the DFFH portfolio response submitted to the Committee.

Education for children and young people, and parents and carers

13. **The Committee has heard that there is a need to educate children and young people on the risks of high-control coercive groups. To what extent is this already included in the curriculum?**

13a. If not, where is best placed?

The Victorian Curriculum provides the basis for teaching and learning about safe and respectful relationships and identifies the knowledge, skills and understanding for students to be able to engage in safe and respectful relationships. The department supports schools to deliver this curriculum through the optional *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* and *Building Respectful Relationships* teaching and learning materials, developed by education experts. These age-appropriate resources help students to build their social, emotional, and positive relationship skills. The resources equip students with strategies to seek help and to build their knowledge, skills and understanding to engage in safe and respectful relationships, including how to recognise and respond to coercive control. This broad range of skills can be applied to group-based coercive control.

14. **What scope is there in the Victorian Curriculum to explore group-based coercive control? Can there be elaborations in the Curriculum, particularly in the Personal and Social Capabilities section?**

The Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials provide students with the social, emotional, and positive relationship skills to recognise unhealthy relationships and behaviours and signs of abuse, and the strategies and skills to seek help and use protective behaviours, including how to recognise and respond to coercive control. This broad range of skills can be applied to group-based coercive control.

15. **What information does the Respectful Relationships initiative include on coercive control in intimate partner relationships?**

   15a. **What is the Department's position on expanding this content to include group-based coercion?**

   15b. **What age/year/cohort is most appropriate to introduce education and awareness on the topic of group-based coercion?**

Respectful Relationships is a primary prevention of family violence initiative. The initiative supports schools to promote and model respect, gender equality, and positive attitudes and behaviours, which teaches students how to build healthy relationships, resilience, and confidence. The whole school approach to Respectful Relationships supports schools to embed a culture of respect and gender equality across the school community.

Delivery of respectful relationships education using the age-appropriate Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials from Foundation to Year 12 provide students with the social, emotional, and positive relationship skills to recognise unhealthy relationships and behaviours and signs of abuse, and the strategies and skills to seek help and use protective behaviours. These resources support students to understand interpersonal gender-based violence and family violence, including how to recognise and respond to coercive control and provide teachers with research and evidence around coercion and gender-based violence.

16. **The Committee has heard of the dangers of high-control coercive groups recruitment online through social media platforms. What education or awareness is currently provided to children on online safety and does this include information or warning about online high-control coercive groups?**

The department provides a range of resources to support schools to help ensure students have the skills and knowledge to be safe online and guidance on where to go for support if needed.

Safe Socials creates a recognisable and accessible online portal that raises awareness for schools, parents, carers, and students to ensure they can find information on supports available, including how to respond to concerns about social media use.

Safe Socials includes fact sheets for parents and carers of primary and secondary aged students, with information about what to do if their child has experienced something unsafe online. Safe Socials also includes a fact sheet for secondary school students that gives tips on how to be safe online.

Safe Socials also refers students, parents, and school staff to the eSafety Commissioner's website for resources and information to help manage online safety issues.

Every school in Victoria can access the [Alannah and Madeline eSmart Schools program](#), which provides a framework and support to help schools prepare for, and respond to, online risks and bullying. It builds a culture of safe and responsible technology use. eSmart Advisors can help identify needs and provide support to encourage schoolwide positive use of digital technology.

The age-appropriate Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials also help students to build their social, emotional, and positive relationship skills, including strategies and skills to seek help and to build their knowledge, skills and understanding to engage in safe and respectful relationships, including online.

17. **What other avenues or contact points outside of formal education could be used to deliver education and awareness of high-control coercive groups to children and young people?**

- eSafety Commissioner

- Alannah and Madeline Foundation

- Places where young people socialise and play, for example sports and recreation clubs and music programs.

18. **What guidance or training do schools provide to help parents and carers to recognise potential risks and early warning signs associated with coercive high-control groups, including online recruitment and influence? What strategies for schools to involve parents and carers in preventative education of this nature would the Department recommend?**

The department does not provide direct training to parents and carers. The department will share information and advice from other agencies such as the Commission for Children and Young People, Victoria Police, and the Australian Federal Police with schools to disseminate to parents and carers.

The department's child safety policies are public and available. Schools are supported to communicate to their communities about raising concerns.

Safe Socials creates a recognisable and accessible online portal that raises awareness for schools, parents, carers, and students to ensure they can find information on supports available, including how to respond to concerns about social media use.