

CHILD MATTERS – speaking up for children

Child Matters, New Zealand's specialist child abuse prevention organisation

Is your child's school safe? Five key questions to ask...

By **RACHEL MCGUIRE**

Our children are back at school and the immediate issues of logistics, stationery and uniforms have been sorted. For most of us, our households have fallen into a normal routine where school, childcare, work and business co-exist relatively smoothly.

As parents we expect, rightly, that our children will be safe at school.

However, we often read new articles about teachers physically and emotionally abusing children in their care, incidents of sexual offending, of children moving from one school to another and extreme cases of bullying.

Now is a good time to think about the school or childcare centre your child attends and assure yourself that it is a safe place for your child (and all the other children) to be in.

Many schools have excellent policies and processes in place that provide a safe environment for their children. However, some schools could do more to ensure that those policies and processes are effective.

Following are five ques-

tions you can ask your children's schools to give you an idea of whether they are doing enough to keep your children safe.

- Do they have comprehensive policies on child protection? Do they provide information for families about their policies?
- Do they provide clear guidelines about what to do if there are concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing?
- Do they have specifically trained people who can deal with any allegations of abuse and provide support to the children affected?
- Do they have a rigorous recruitment and selection processes to ensure all adults involved with children are safe to be in that role?
- Do they have clear policies about dealing with bullying and complaints?

If you ask your school these questions and you are not satisfied with the answers, it is important that you do something about it.

A good starting point would be to contact the Board of Trustees and voice your concerns.

While the principals, associate principals and deputy principals are the most visible 'managers' in the school, ultimately the responsibility for having safe policies, procedures and systems in place rests with the Board of Trustees.

Child Matters is a specialist in child protection and can provide advice, training and resources to schools in child protection, policy development and recruitment.

If your school wants any support with these areas it can contact Child Matters.

About Child Matters

Every child deserves to flourish in an environment safe from all abuse. Child Matters is determined to ensure that this happens.

Child Matters is a national charitable trust based in Hamilton that is dedicated to:

- Raising understanding and awareness of the issue
- Educating and inspiring those working with children
- Influencing change in society's attitudes and behaviours

www.childmatters.org.nz

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