



Department of Education  
and Children's Services

CE 2005/01566

Ms Jan McMahon  
General Secretary  
Public Service Association of SA Incorporated  
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Dear Ms McMahon

I refer to your letter of 9 May 2005 regarding school services officers (SSOs) in schools.

I would like to assure you that the health and safety of all Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) staff, including school services officers, is of the utmost importance to me.

No staff member is expected to intervene in violent situations that may place that staff member at risk of injury or potential risk. Staff are expected to assess each situation on an individual basis and to obtain the necessary support to assist them in the most appropriate and expeditious manner.

The DECS School Discipline Policy supports the provision of a safe environment where the rights of students to learn and teachers to teach are respected. There are a number of district support services staff who are available to work collaboratively with staff to manage students with behavioural issues and to develop the necessary behaviour management programs to support teachers and SSOs in dealing with students with behavioural problems.

SSOs can assist a teacher with yard duty but cannot be responsible for students during this time. The duty of care delegated to a teacher cannot be further delegated. Principals should ensure that SSOs only assist with yard duty when absolutely necessary and that duty of care requirements are complied with. Information concerning SSOs undertaking teaching duties and their duty of care towards students is contained in the Department's Administrative Instructions and Guidelines, Section 4, paragraph 78, which states:

*'School services officers must not accept personal responsibility for any portion of the formal learning program or the wider school curriculum. They may have delegated to them a wide range of tasks consistent with the award and their classification provided that a teacher assumes personal oversight and ultimate responsibility.'*

*Teachers cannot delegate the duty of care which they owe to students. School services officers may be left in charge of students for short periods but responsibility for the students' health, safety and welfare rests with the supervising or controlling teacher.'*

Principals are required to ensure that SSOs have the necessary information, instruction and training to do their jobs safely. This is discussed as part of the performance management processes for SSOs where training needs are determined in consideration of their experience, skills, job description and the recommended training profile for SSOs. These training profiles are available on the department's OHSW website [www.decs.sa.gov.au/ohsw](http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/ohsw).

DECS has a range of OHSW programs and procedures that have been developed to support the establishment of safer work places for all employees including SSOs. These include:

- a detailed hazard management procedure to support sites in the identification, assessment and control of hazards;
- a comprehensive consultative network comprising health and safety representatives and local and district OHSW committees;
- an incident and accident reporting and investigation system that requires a local response which is supported by departmental officers as required;
- access to a range of departmental safety training programs that can be negotiated at a site level as part of local training plans or as part of personal development. Information about these services can be accessed through the departmental OHSW website;
- access to targeted support from district and central officers as required.

In addition, Principals have access to a range of information concerning the employment conditions of SSOs. This includes the job and person specification for SSOs in their school, the SSO Award and the South Australian Education Staff Certified Agreement which detail employment conditions, and ready access to both DECS central office staff who deal with HR and Industrial Relations matters and to staff in the Legislative and Legal Services Unit.

Thank you for writing to me on this important matter.

Yours sincerely



Steve Marshall  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Date: 29/6/05