

Law Society offers to mediate as school bullying case falters

By Megan Doherty and Louis Andrews

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A potential legal stoush between the parents of bullied schoolchildren and the ACT Education Department lost traction yesterday when three parents decided to drop the issue. Previously, 15 parents had said they were seeking legal advice on launching a class action against the department for failing to provide a safe learning environment. After meeting department representatives, three parents were persuaded not to take action. The remaining 12 parents were not at the meeting, and it is unclear if they will still seek a class action.

The grandfather of a bullied Canberra High student, who was a driving force behind the class action and wished to remain anonymous for privacy reasons, said the discussion had changed his perspective.

"I still have gripes, I still have disagreements with [Education Department policy], but not to the extent that I initially did," he said. "At the end of the day it's become apparent to me that society is not providing any real solutions to this." He said his daughter was seriously considering withdrawing her child from the school, at the department's suggestion. "I've come to realise that [the department] are handling it in the best way they've been told to do it," he said.

It is understood the parents are expecting legal advice today.

The ACT Law Society has offered to mediate for free, saying the stand-off should not end up in the courts.

Society president Rod Barnett said if the dispute went to court it could take two years to resolve and be very expensive. He said he understood that might be good for lawyers, but not for the clients. Mr Barnett said mediation could offer the parties "assistance in the real sense" and perhaps a quicker solution to addressing what was a complex social issue.

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