

# Education the way to wipe out prejudice

By STEPHEN LONG

Following a spate of gay-hate murders centred in the eastern suburbs, the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby has called for changes to the school curriculum and the appointment of violence prevention officers.

The lobby wants the Minister for Education, Mrs Chadwick, to take measures to stop violence against homosexuals at its source: in the schools.

A recent report showed that more than 80 per cent of gay bashings were committed by school-age boys.

There have been at least five gay-related murders by gangs of young people in the past year. Two of the murders took place in the eastern suburbs and another

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claimed the life of a teacher at Cleveland Street High School.

In the policy paper, released on Sunday, the lobby said parents would welcome any new moves by schools to discourage their children from committing acts of murder or assault.

The paper says the school system contributes to “violence through omission”; not confronting anti-gay prejudices “amounts to complicity in the perpetration of anti-gay and lesbian violence”.

The lobby has called for a meeting with Mrs Chadwick and representatives from the Department of School Education, the

Board of Studies, the NSW Teachers' Federation and the Family and School Community Association, to discuss the policy paper.

It has also called for the appointment of two violence prevention officers to the department to conduct workshops to combat homophobia, similar to those held by police and youth workers last July for students at Cleveland Street High School.

The officers would also respond to specific instances of violence and conduct research into the nature and extent of violence against gays and lesbians within schools.

A spokesman for the ministry said on Monday that Mrs Chadwick had not yet read the lobby's document and was unable to say whether she would grant the meeting.

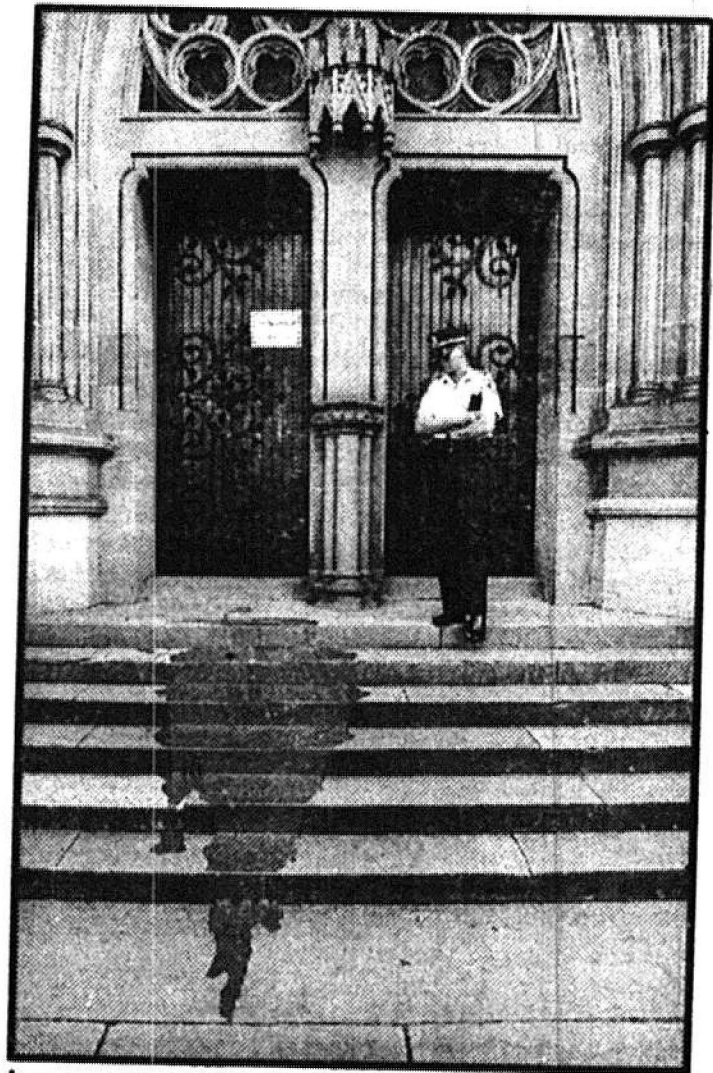
He said the minister believed anti-gay violence was “largely a policing matter”.

A member of the lobby, Randwick High School teacher Mr Derek Williams, said students from Years 8 and 9 “constantly talked about gay-bashing”.

“In six years of teaching, I have been astounded by the profundity of ignorance of students on homosexuality. Most of the myths and errors disappear when there is rational discussion.”

The lobby's report said many school-age youths failed to realise the legal consequences of gay-bashing and were often surprised when police did not condone their action.

● A new group, the Richard Johnson Foundation Committee, was launched on Monday. Named after a man who was bashed to death in Alexandria Park in January 1990, it will campaign for education programs in high schools to combat hatred and prejudice against homosexuals.



A new gay rights' group called One in Seven fulfilled a promise to “paint the town red” on Monday, splashing red paint over public buildings, including St Mary's Cathedral (above). In Darlinghurst, hundreds responded to calls to wear red (“the colour of our blood”) and pink (“the colour of our pride”) to protest about violence against homosexuals. The group issued a leaflet which read: “We are denounced by the Church, discriminated against by Parliament and the justice system, stereotyped in the media and swept under the carpet by the education system. With these forces at work moulding attitudes, it is any wonder that young people reckon it's OK to kill us?”