Teacher safety a serious concern

Physical and verbal abuse of teachers across the Territory is widespread and a matter of serious concern, according to Shadow Education Minister and former school principal, Terry Mills.

Mr. Mills said that the Government is hiding from the public the number of assaults and abuses of teachers.

“School principals are Government employees and will, naturally, reflect the views of the Education Department and the Government,” Mr. Mills said.

“Principals will be reluctant to reveal the true extent of this problem – for obvious reasons.

“But if you take the time to speak to the members of school councils you find that abuse of teachers is occurring far too often.”

An 18 year-old man recently assaulted a teacher at the Umbakumba School on Groote Eylandt and then returned to the school with a machete. He allegedly threw the machete at the teachers as they fled in a motor vehicle. The school has been closed since Friday.

The four teachers have now refused to return to the school. Previous violence at the school had led to teachers refusing to live at the community, instead choosing to live 60 kilometres away and travel each day to school.

Mr. Mills said that the Government had to take decisive action to ensure teachers received appropriate support in the face of verbal or physical threats.

“When will this Government understand that certain elements of society have to be treated with fair but firm measures,” he said, “they do not and will not understand repeated forgiveness. They see it as a weakness.
“It is time to implement tough love in the interests of all other Territory students.

“Parents must be made accountable for their children’s actions. And students who assault any teacher should be immediately expelled from the school. Not suspended, expelled!

"The Government’s new Youth Justice Bill will make controlling violent students even more difficult and details of assaults and incidents are unlikely to even be reported under this legislation.”