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Educate teachers to raise alarm

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Experts back grooming call

Scott Kovacevic

Experts in childhood sexual abuse are backing calls by grooming victim Sarah Kopp for better training for teachers to expose a “national blind spot” being exploited in Queensland schools.

Ms Kopp has called for mandatory and improved training for teachers in recognising and responding to student grooming in Queensland schools, saying the existing program “barely scratches the surface”.

Queensland University of Technology researcher Jodi Death supported the push, saying even specialist health teachers were not given adequate education.

“Even health teachers ... only get about three hours training on sex and relationships,” Dr Death said. “The people that are in charge of curriculum delivery on sex and relationships are having minimal training.

“That doesn’t help them

have a difficult conversation.”

Dr Death said early intervention was crucial, which included new training to help teachers identify child grooming signs in their early stages.

“The sooner you can detect a problem, and the sooner you can provide positive intervention and positive belief for survivors ... you can minimise the damage that has occurred regardless of the ... extent of the sexual harm,” she said.

The comments come after former Hervey Bay high school student Ms Kopp revealed she was so extensively groomed by her physical education teacher Paul Edward Grealy in the early 2000s that she eventually married him before leaving the relationship in 2014 and reporting her husband to police. Grealy was jailed in May 2024, after being found guilty of five counts of indecent treatment of a child and one count of maintaining an unlawful rela-

tionship with a child.

University of NSW Sydney researcher Michael Salter said comprehensive training for teachers on child grooming prevention was “a massive gap” that stretched outside of Queensland.

“It’s a national blind spot,” Professor Salter said.

“There is a massive lack of research and transparency around rates of sexual abuse and misconduct in schools.

“At the moment we’ve got better data on victimisation of teachers by students, than we have of students by teachers.

“We don’t have much transparency across the states and territories from the regulators and the department of education in terms of the information they release about reports and outcomes.

“All child-focused institutions need to come to grips with the fact they are differentially targeted by premeditated offenders.”



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