



School near top for complaints

SAFETY: Anti-bullying Coalition sees pattern in how school handles bullying
By JENNIFER O'BRIEN, The London Free Press
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A London group set up to combat bullying is all too familiar with the situation that's left teachers feeling unsafe at St. Thomas Aquinas secondary school, its co-founder says.

"It's one of the top three secondary schools we get calls from," said Corina Morrison, co-founder of the London Anti-Bullying Coalition.

"I'm sure it's just a handful of kids causing the trouble, but the parents who call us are all concerned about the lack of effectiveness from administration when it comes to their children being bullied at the school."

Morrison said the coalition has received more than six complaints from parents who say their kids have been repeatedly bullied at STA during the past year and a half.

To put that into context, she said, there are many high schools in London that haven't generated any calls to the coalition.

The anti-bullying coalition aims to support bullied youth and their parents who are not being helped in the system.

Morrison said there is a "pattern" to the cases she hears about at STA.

"Teachers are willing to do what they have to do, and when a student is unruly they get sent down to the office, but is usually sent back to the classroom within five minutes," she said.

In a petition signed by more than 60% of the staff at STA last month, employees called on the board to make their environment safer -- noting the discipline doled out has "not adequately ensured the safety of staff and students."

The petition calls for action to be taken under Bill 168, which was passed last year and requires Ontario school boards to take action to protect employees from workplace violence and harassment.

School principal Linda Thomas has referred questions to London District Catholic school board officials, who've said they're working with staff and administration at the school to address the concerns.

While schools are expected to follow discipline guidelines outlined in the Education Act, Ontario's Safe Schools Strategy leaves the details of progressive discipline up to the interpretation of each administrator.

"If you've got teachers and students reporting the bullying going on, but an administrator who appears not to be doing anything, what do you do?" asked Morrison, who's been pushing to have boards be accountable to a third-party investigator.