What happens if I drop the F&*$ bomb?

We all know that it happens – take a walk around many schools and you will hear swearing and foul language. To some degree, many expletive words have become a part of the vernacular and are not considered as socially unacceptable as they once were. However, this does not alter the fact that if you are at school and using language which causes offence to someone, you may be breaking the law. Let’s go through some examples –

**Scenario 1:** If a student was wandering around school yelling at the top of their lungs ‘F#$% Off!’, that student would be committing the offence of “Use Offensive language” under the Summary Offences Act 1988. (Max penalty: 6 penalty units or $500 infringement)

**Scenario 2:** If a student in woodwork class accidentally hit their thumb with a hammer and yelled ‘f$%*!’ because they were in shock and pain, their use of the fbomb could be considered to be reasonable and NOT offensive under the circumstances. (Max penalty: sore thumb and hurt pride)

**Scenario 3:** If a student is asked by a teacher to head off to class and the student said, ‘F#$% off, I’m not doing what you say you f’n dog’ before giving the teacher the finger, kicking over a chair and walking off, the student is committing the offence of “Offensive Conduct” under the Summary Offences Act 1988. (Max penalty: 6 penalty units or imprisonment for 3 months)

**Scenario 4:** If while on school grounds a person raises a clenched fist and says to a student, teacher or other member of staff, “I’m going to bash your F#$%ing head in”, that person has committed an offence under Section 60E of the Crimes Act 1900 No 40 which states, (1) A person who assaults, stalks, harasses or intimidates any school student or member of staff of a school while the student or member of staff is attending a school, although no actual bodily harm is occasioned, is liable to imprisonment for 5 years.

So, what does this all mean for you? It means that as a part of a school community, whether you are a parent, student or teacher, you have a responsibility to act in a way that is socially acceptable and in accordance with the rules of the community. The test of what is acceptable would be judged by a person who is reasonably tolerant, not someone who is easily offended or ‘thin-skinned’. Think about the kind of community you want to live and learn in and behave accordingly. Keep your interactions with other members of your community, whether they be students, parents or teachers, respectful.

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