

Anti-Bullying Rapid Review

Informing a Consistent National Standard to Address Bullying in Schools

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) appreciates the opportunity to make this submission to the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review (the Review).

NCEC welcomes this Australian Government initiative to ensure safe and supportive environments for students in all Australian schools by reducing bullying and the underlying causes of bullying in schools.

About NCEC

NCEC is the peak body for Catholic education in Australia and is responsible for the national coordination and representation of Catholic schools and school authorities. Our role is to ensure the needs of Catholic schools are served through funding, legislation, and policy.

NCEC advocates at the national level on behalf of the Catholic sector and the hundreds of thousands of Australian families who entrust the education of their children to our schools.

Catholic schools are universal in reach and open to all families who seek a Catholic education. Australia's 1,755 mostly low-fee Catholic schools educate one in five, or 820,000, students and employ more than 112,000 staff. This makes Catholic schools the nation's largest provider of education outside of government.

NCEC works to foster a thriving Catholic education sector that offers parents a choice of, and affordable access to, faith-based education for their children that is consistent with Catholic beliefs, values, and teachings. Catholic education is unique in its provision and scope in the world offering a parallel, alternative system of faith-based schools alongside government.

Catholic schools make a significant contribution to the educational, moral, and social fabric of this nation. Over 200 years, Catholic schools have educated millions of Australian children. Catholic school alumni have gone on to make substantial contributions in civic life, in business, in the Church, in community leadership, in social outreach, and among other arenas of public and private life.

The mission of Catholic education, since its inception, has been to serve students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly the disadvantaged and marginalised. Our schools welcome students from a range of backgrounds including an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (up over 60 per cent over ten years). Students with disability represent almost 21 per cent of Catholic school enrolment, and over 42 per cent of students experience socio-educational disadvantage. Almost 40 per cent of Catholic schools are in regional and remote areas.

Catholic school families, many of whom have a long and multi-generational involvement in our communities, continue to choose a Catholic education because it aligns with their beliefs and values. The sustained growth of our school communities shows the great importance, and the sacrifice Catholic school families continue to make to choose a school that meets the educational needs of their children and one that reflects their faith and values.

Our schools are committed to educational excellence and pastoral care, underpinned by charisms of prayer, witness, catechesis, and social justice. Providing learning opportunities for students, staff, and parents to nurture and display these qualities in service of others plays a crucial role in the educational, service, and faith formation provided by Catholic schools.

Australian Catholic Education Bodies and Organisation

NCEC works closely with the eight state and territory Catholic Education Commissions as well as with diocesan and Religious Institutes and Ministerial Public Juridic Person (RI&MPJP) school authorities.

State and territory Catholic Education Commissions are the approved funding authorities under federal, state and territory legislation and are the approved 'Non-Government Representative Bodies' under the Australian Education Act.

The majority of Catholic schools across Australia are systemic schools owned and operated by Catholic education offices within each Catholic diocese. There are [seven archdioceses and 21 dioceses](#) across Australia. The day-to-day operational responsibility, including the employment of staff for systemic Catholic schools, lies with the diocesan school authority.

Around 17 per cent of Catholic school students are enrolled in schools that are sponsored by RI&MPJP school authorities (sometimes referred to as 'independent' Catholic schools). The day-to-day operational responsibility, including the employment of staff and enrolment of students, for RI&MPJPs lies with the individual school or RI&MPJP school authority.

The Review

Catholic education is deeply committed to student and staff safety, wellbeing, and mental health in all of our schools. Our commitment is grounded in Catholic belief and social teaching in the inherent dignity of each individual with particular attention to those marginalised and disadvantaged.

NCEC is represented as a standing member organisation on the Reference Group established to support the Review's co-chairs, Dr Charlotte Keating and Dr Jo Robinson AM. The Reference Group will advise on current high-level education system and policy issues, including school-based Anti-Bullying strategies, policies and procedures to help identify warning signs, the interventions required, and the support provided to students and parents.

A range of Catholic education authorities and bodies - Commissions, dioceses, and individual schools – as well as Catholic educators, school leaders, and parents, have also made submissions to the current Review.

As noted above, these Catholic education authorities own and operate Catholic schools on a day-to-day basis. NCEC therefore encourages the Review to refer the responses of these bodies to the questions about specific local policies and practices listed in the Review's Consultation paper.

A Consistent National Standard

In addition to examining what current anti-bullying policies and practices are working and what needs strengthening, the Review has also been tasked with reporting to Education Ministers with options for the development of a consistent national standard for responding to bullying and its underlying causes in schools.

The intent of this advice is that a standard could inform policies across jurisdictions, in both the government and non-government school sectors, to provide children and parents confidence that no matter where a child goes to school, if they're experiencing bullying, it will be managed in an appropriate way.

While supporting the development and implementation of a consistent national standard within schools in principle, NCEC recommends that development and composition of any potential national standard should be informed by a number of high-level guidelines to prioritise the safety, wellbeing, and mental health of students.

A consistent national standard in schools should:

- *Be evidence informed*

A standard should incorporate relevant research and evidence on frameworks and best practices in relation to prevent and respond to bullying in school contexts which address both bullying behaviours and reducing the underlying causes.

A standard should be informed by evidence for system level, whole school, and individualised policy, frameworks, and practice.

- *Be flexible and adaptable*

A standard should not create a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all regulation; it should be flexible and adaptable for local areas and contexts.

Schools and systems must be able to differentiate the standard to meet their local cultural, geographic, social, and strategic considerations and priorities after community consultation, inclusive of student and parent voice.

- *Not create duplication*

A standard should not create duplication by replicating existing standards and initiatives or by adding to red tape through extensive or onerous reporting requirements.

Schools and systems must be able to use the standard, and any potential reporting or data collection, with a one-off requirement which meets their obligations to all levels of government and regulation authorities.

- *Facilitate collaboration*

A standard, while flexible and adaptable to meet particular contexts and conditions, should also create a framework and aspiration to facilitate cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional collaboration.

Importantly, as the Terms of Reference for the Review acknowledge,

Bullying is a complex social issue that requires action at multiple levels: within schools at the leader, educator and student levels; within families and communities; and across all levels of government and non-government school organisations.

Consequently, while the guidelines identified above specifically address a consistent national standard in schools they also are intended to strongly suggest the importance of partnerships, co-operation, and mutual support between schools, family, and community settings to successfully address bullying.

Conclusion

NCEC welcomes this Australian Government initiative to ensure safe and supportive environments for students in all Australian schools by reducing bullying and the underlying causes of bullying in schools.

NCEC in principle supports the development and implementation of a consistent national standard within schools and recommends that the development and composition of any potential national standard should be informed by a number of high-level guidelines , including that a standard should

- Be evidence informed
- Not be overly prescriptive
- Not create duplication
- Facilitate collaboration

Additionally, as bullying is a complex social issue that extends beyond school settings, the role of partnerships, co-operation, and mutual support between schools, families, and communities to address bullying and the causes of bullying can not be ignored.

Further information

NCEC looks forward to further consultation as part of the Review.

Should you have any further questions in relation to this submission, please contact me via phone 02 8229 0808 or via email jacinta.collins@ncec.catholic.edu.au.

Yours faithfully



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