



Australian Government



Final Report from the

Anti-Bullying Rapid Review



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The document must be attributed as the *Final Report from the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review*.

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Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them, their cultures and Elders past and present.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the people with lived experience of bullying and its impacts, including students and their families, who provided input to the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review (the Review). We value their generosity and willingness to contribute to the Review, including after facing the direct consequences or the most tragic results of bullying. We have heard your firsthand experience with the aim of supporting change to address bullying in schools.

We also acknowledge and thank the many teaching bodies, non-government organisations, Commonwealth agencies and state and territory departments that contributed and helped inform the development of the Final Report from the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review (the report).

The report includes quotes and case examples from people and organisations with their permission.

Content warning

This report includes information that may be confronting or distressing for some people. Some of the themes covered in the report include bullying, discrimination, gender-based violence, mental health and suicide.

If you need additional support or would like someone to talk to, private and confidential support is available from:

- ▶ Lifeline – 13 11 14
- ▶ Beyond Blue – 1300 224 636
- ▶ headspace – 1800 650 890
- ▶ Kids Helpline – 1800 551 800
- ▶ 1800RESPECT – 1800 737 732
- ▶ 13YARN – 13 92 76
- ▶ The Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467
- ▶ QLife – 1800 184 527



Letter of Transmission

Dear Minister

Final Report from the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review

In February 2025, you announced the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review (the Review) to examine what is working to prevent and respond to bullying in Australian schools and what needs strengthening, before reporting to Education Ministers.

We are pleased to present the report of that Review. The report responds to the Review's Terms of Reference and presents key findings and recommendations aimed at building on efforts to date, driving change and supporting implementation action against bullying in the school context.

We acknowledge and express our deep gratitude to those who provided invaluable contributions to the Review, particularly the students and families with lived experience of bullying, including families who have experienced the most tragic results of bullying. We value their willingness to share their stories and suggestions to support improvements into the future.

We also acknowledge and thank all members of the Reference Group, who provided a breadth of advice, and the many teaching bodies, non-government organisations, and Commonwealth and state and territory departments that contributed to and helped inform the development of the Review report.

We also thank each member of the Australian Government Department of Education's Anti-Bullying Rapid Review Taskforce, for their immense support and dedication, which has been hugely valuable to us in our capacities to progress the Review report.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this critical issue. We trust the findings and recommendations of this Review will contribute to ongoing efforts by governments, the education sector and school communities to take further informed and empowered action against bullying for the benefit of our young people, our school workforce and our society.

Yours sincerely



Dr Charlotte Keating



Professor Jo Robinson AM

Executive Summary

The Anti-Bullying Rapid Review (the Review) was announced in February 2025 by the Australian Government Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP. The purpose of the Review was to examine what is working to prevent and respond to bullying in schools and what needs strengthening, before reporting to Education Ministers. This report sets out the findings of the Review in response to the Terms of Reference.

Australia's schooling system is committed to providing positive learning environments and supporting the safety and wellbeing of students, and schools are taking active steps to achieve this and enable young people to thrive. Bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (referred to as bullying and other harmful behaviours throughout this report), are increasingly impacting these core goals and there is an opportunity and need for a national reset.

Bullying and other harmful behaviours are hurting our young people and their futures, and action by Education Ministers, school systems and schools is urgently needed to address this growing and critical issue. Noting this, it is recognised that bullying and other harmful behaviours are not just something that schools contend with, and that there is a need to consider them as broader societal issues.

For the context of this report, bullying is considered within a continuum of harmful behaviours and negative interpersonal behaviours, whether physical or psychosocial, that are counter to creating a safe learning environment. Considering bullying within this continuum embeds a shared understanding and clear expectations that all harmful behaviours

warrant appropriate and reasonable action, including early intervention, to address the harm experienced, regardless of the intent or subjective understanding of bullying. This also includes through trauma-informed and relationship-focused approaches that consider and seek to address the unique context and drivers of the behaviour.

Bullying significantly impacts students' mental health and wellbeing, with students who are bullied 3 to 6 times more likely to experience issues such as depression, self-harm or suicidal ideation compared to their peers.¹ Bullying also undermines student attendance, engagement and learning outcomes; can have lifelong health and relationship impacts; and has broader impacts on social cohesion and Australia's economy.² Bullying can also have tragic consequences, including young Australians dying by suicide.

This is a growing problem, with over one in four Year 4 to Year 9 students (27%) reporting being bullied every few weeks or more often.³ Rates of cyberbullying among school students are also increasing, with 53% of young Australians reporting experiencing cyberbullying and reports of cyberbullying to the eSafety Commissioner

increasing by 455% between 2019 and 2024.⁴ Bullying and other harmful behaviours are also increasingly impacting Australia's school workforce, whether through directly experiencing or responding to these issues, and can contribute to staff feeling overwhelmed, feeling unsafe and even leaving the profession.

The Review heard that Australia's schooling environment is complex and that bullying and other harmful behaviours are issues to be managed alongside other pressures such as classroom disruption; mental health and wellbeing; inequality; discrimination and racism; targeted bullying and other harmful behaviours toward teachers; and other societal influences. Cyberbullying and other online harms, including emerging issues such as image-based abuse (deepfakes), are also increasingly permeating today's learning environments. The modern schooling context and evolving external influences require refreshed consideration of how to effectively prevent and respond to bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools.

Bullying and other harmful behaviours are complex social issues that happen across society and not something that happens only in schools or something that schools can address in isolation. Action on bullying and other harmful behaviours goes beyond the education setting and needs a whole-of-society response, and Education Ministers, through their collective action in response to this report, can play a critical role.

The co-chairs acknowledge and appreciate the commitment of school leaders, teachers and staff in supporting their students' safety, wellbeing and engagement. The Review found that there is a vast range of anti-bullying policies, practices and programs in place to support schools to prevent and act on bullying, and that effective strategies are being used across schools and school systems. However, the Review also found that approaches can vary and that students, parents/carers and school staff can struggle to find or understand information about how to report and deal with bullying, leading to uncertainty and mistrust around whether bullying will be appropriately managed in their school.





The Review consistently heard strong support for a system that resets national expectations through a National Standard so that every Australian school is a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment, where bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted and will be actively addressed. The vision for the future is outlined through this report and the recommendations.

A successful national approach requires shared commitments and dedicated action to drive and achieve change. In practice, this requires action across key areas that, taken together, create learning environments that are safe, inclusive and respectful, and protect and support our young people now and for future generations of students to come.

The whole school community working together

The Review repeatedly heard that any effort to address bullying and other harmful behaviours must involve a whole-of-school approach, with appropriate leadership and support from school systems. This means all parts of the school community – school leaders, teachers and staff, students, parents/carers and the wider community – working together with the same intention guided by proactive leadership from the school system they operate within.

Whole-of-school approaches involve establishing and embedding shared expectations, rules and messaging around positive behaviour across the school's culture and practices. They include strong and visible leadership, setting and promoting expectations across a school's culture and practices, building strong relationships, and ensuring the voice of students, parents/carers and the school workforce is actively included in the development and implementation of school anti-bullying efforts. The approaches should also consider and address the unique needs of the local school context, including the needs of diverse student groups and school staff including First Nations people, those who identify as LGBTIQ+, people with disability, women and girls, and other groups.

The approaches should include actions to support students, parents/carers, the school workforce and wider school communities to contribute to the delivery of anti-bullying actions, be positive upstanders, and uphold expectations outside the school gates, including in the context of cyberbullying, deepfakes and other online harms.

Evidence shows whole-of-school approaches can significantly reduce bullying. The Review heard this is not occurring routinely and is an area where a dedicated focus can make a difference.

Creating clarity and confidence in school and school system responses

One of the strongest themes the Review heard was the need for greater clarity and confidence that bullying and other harmful behaviours will be acted on and managed in a timely and appropriate way – in other words, strengthening the transparency, accountability and timeliness of action.

The Review heard that existing anti-bullying policies and procedures can be hard to find and may not have been informed by the voices of students, parents/carers, or the school workforce. There were calls for schools and school systems to develop clear anti-bullying policies and procedures in collaboration with their school communities. These policies and procedures should clearly outline expectations around positive behaviour, options for reporting an incident or a complaint, what steps will be taken by the school, what supports are available, and fair and transparent escalation processes where an incident has not been effectively resolved. Schools should publish these clearly on their websites, raise awareness of them through available communication channels, and regularly promote and model them within their communities.

Timely responses were also considered critical. Schools should make reasonable effort to initiate a response to any observed or reported harmful behaviour, including bullying, within two school days of becoming aware of the behaviour. This should include through initial safety and support planning, action to prevent further harm and initial communication actions – recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issue. The Review also heard strong partnerships between schools, school systems and parents/carers are key to collaboratively addressing incidents of bullying and other harmful behaviours.

The Review also heard of the need for schools to communicate what actions have been taken, and the reasons for those actions, to the greatest

extent possible within privacy responsibilities. In many cases good policies and practices are in place; however, there are opportunities for ensuring greater transparency and accessibility of school policies and processes for the whole school community, to build trust and reinforce the message that bullying and other harmful behaviours are not acceptable and will be addressed.

The Review heard that ‘reporting for supporting’ would help embed a commitment to continuous improvement and reinforce accountability for action on bullying and other harmful behaviours. In effect, record keeping would outline the steps taken against the school’s anti-bullying policy and procedures and support the school’s ability to identify risks, support early intervention, understand the effectiveness of approaches, and make informed adjustments of policies and practices where needed.

Schools should analyse student-level data to identify bullying-related risks within their school community, to help inform targeted prevention, early intervention, response and support activities. This would also support continual improvement, including monitoring impacts of action and adapting to emerging trends and risks. Consideration is needed of systems-level data collection and research that could further inform and support national action on bullying and other harmful behaviours.

**The Review repeatedly heard
that any effort to address bullying
and other harmful behaviours must
involve a whole-of-school approach,
with appropriate leadership and
support from school systems.**

Intervening early and appropriately

Evidence-based prevention, early and proactive intervention, and response actions are all needed to effectively address bullying and other harmful behaviours. The focus should be on stopping bullying and other harmful behaviours before they start and intervening early when they do occur, to prevent further harm and support recovery. The Review heard there is a need for clear guidance for schools across each stage of the intervention continuum.

A prevention focus aims to actively minimise the risk of bullying and other harmful behaviours occurring. It includes clear behavioural expectations and actions to nurture a safe, inclusive and respectful school culture – for example, through the development of school values or charters at enrolment which set clear expectations that are embedded in the school culture and modelled by all members of the school community. This approach also includes age and developmentally appropriate education on respectful relationships, social and emotional learning, and digital safety and citizenship, as well as explicit teaching on bullying and cyberbullying.

Stakeholders also noted the importance of early and proactive intervention approaches to enable schools to identify and address early signs of behavioural concern so they do not progress into more harmful behaviours, and ensuring wellbeing supports are available.

Further opportunities for early intervention can be enhanced by using dedicated tools to identify students showing risk factors relating to bullying and other harmful behaviours, and to enable personalised intervention to commence. Early intervention tools can also enable schools and school systems to identify broader risk factors and needs, beyond individuals, to further support evidence-informed, targeted, whole-of-school approaches.

There is no single right way to respond to incidents of bullying and other harmful behaviours. The Review heard schools and school systems

must take evidence-based, proportionate, defensible and tailored action that is appropriate for the unique circumstances involved, including individual student factors and support needs for both the student who has experienced bullying or other harmful behaviours and the student who engaged in this behaviour. Importantly, response models should prioritise safety and be backed by current evidence. The Review heard some schools were successfully implementing evidence-based approaches which had the potential to be further scaled. Some Review contributors suggested the benefit of a national ‘menu’ or clearinghouse of evidence-based and endorsed programs or approaches to inform their response actions, noting some jurisdictions currently use wellbeing tools to support their efforts.

While the Review heard of the need for accountable responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours, it also heard of the limitations of purely punitive responses, which can fail to address the underlying causes of the behaviour, can increase the risk of further harm, and seldom lead to learning related improvements. Consistent with the research, the Review heard that students who experience bullying and other harmful behaviours can also engage in this behaviour and vice versa, underscoring the importance of addressing underlying factors.

Evidence highlights the benefits of trauma-informed and relationship-focused responses, including those delivered in collaboration with external partners. These approaches work to understand and address the causes of the bullying and other harmful behaviours, reflect on the impacts, and end the bullying cycle. The Review also heard that the goal of restoration can be, but is not always, relationship repair, and sometimes a satisfactory outcome can be neutrality or one that allows for agreed separations and facilitating reintegration of a student.

It is critical that response approaches prioritise safety and wellbeing, including ensuring appropriate supports are available to both students who have experienced harm and students who engaged in the bullying or other form of harmful behaviour.

Supporting the school workforce

A well trained and supported school workforce is essential for preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools and supporting a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment. Research shows that teachers often feel under-prepared for dealing with bullying and other harmful behaviours, and that teacher training is an important element of anti-bullying best practice. Teacher training can help reduce bullying rates and positively influence classroom management and learning experiences.⁵

The Review also heard strongly that school staff are increasingly experiencing bullying, physical violence, sexual harassment, emotional abuse and other harmful behaviours in the workplace. Specifically, reports of deepfakes, other online harms and sexual harassment are resulting in teachers, and in particular female teachers, feeling unsafe at work. For example, a recent survey of Australian teachers found that almost 48% of female teachers reported being sexually harassed at school.⁶ The right to a safe workplace is a fundamental principle enshrined in Australia's work health and safety laws. Actions to address bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools must also include actions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the school workforce, including in line with broader existing commitments in this space.

The Review heard the school workforce would benefit from clear information on and a shared understanding of school anti-bullying policies and procedures. There is also a need for trauma-informed training and resources for the school workforce on bullying and other harmful behaviours, their influencing factors (i.e. risk and protective factors), evidence-based responses, and related issues such as appropriate classroom behaviour management and respectful relationships education.

Teachers and non-teaching school staff, regardless of their years in the profession, also reported wanting practical advice and resources on anti-bullying interventions, including how to manage the evolving online environment.

This includes more information and guidance on how to manage deepfakes being created or shared by students and other online harms.

While the school workforce is already very busy, the Review heard that dedicated training in the above areas can generate greater gains, such as supporting classroom behaviour and student engagement – ultimately reducing the workload of school staff. Education sector contributors to the Review further noted that education systems need to provide systemic supports for school leaders, and that schools need to allow dedicated time for staff to participate in training and activities to prevent and respond to bullying and other harmful behaviour.

National systemic change

Supporting all school systems, schools, students, parents/carers and the school workforce to address bullying and other harmful behaviours requires a clear and dedicated focus. The Review heard the maturity of a school's anti-bullying infrastructure affects the extent to which bullying and other harmful behaviours are normalised or left unchecked; schools with unclear bullying policies and expectations are less equipped to identify and respond to bullying and other harmful behaviours and create the conditions for prevention.

The Review repeatedly heard that a National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools (National Standard) can set anti-bullying expectations and inform prevention and response actions across Australia – to ensure that all Australian schools are healthy and safe learning and work environments.

Informed by the findings of the Review, a multifaceted, principles-based National Standard is suggested below for Education Ministers to consider implementing nationally.

The Review found that to uphold students' right to education and a safe learning environment, and to ensure impact and the credibility of the suggested National Standard, it must be supported by multifaceted actions and be relevant to multiple intended audiences. It must also flow through to all systems and schools and be embedded in school-based policies and practices.

Implementing national expectations and actions across Australia would be supported by consistent and contemporary understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools. The Review heard of the need for further work on this, particularly noting that the online and wider landscapes in which schools operate have shifted considerably since the current national definition was last updated by Australian Education Authorities in 2018. However, it is critical that schools address all forms of harmful behaviour, regardless of whether the behaviour falls within a definition of bullying, to foster safer and more inclusive and respectful communities and to stop bullying and other harmful behaviours from the start.

Importantly, while a National Standard should set consistent expectations and requirements and be adhered to, it should provide school systems and schools with flexibility to address bullying and other harmful behaviours in a way that is appropriate for their unique local contexts. This recognises the diverse characteristics of Australian schools and student populations, and that school systems, schools and their communities are best placed to understand local needs and circumstances. This includes tailored responses to reflect the unique experiences and needs of diverse student groups, such as First Nations students, students with disability, neurodivergent students and LGBTIQ+ students.

A National Standard would not replace or be counter to anti-bullying efforts already in place. Rather, it would strengthen commitments nationally and inform effective approaches to ensure that collectively Australia is taking the best possible stance against bullying and other harmful behaviours and ending the harmful effects they are having on our young people and their futures.

Education and awareness-raising efforts are encouraged to support implementation of the National Standard and increase understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours, their influence and impacts, and to help promote whole-of-community action. This could include the development and delivery of a national primary prevention and behaviour change

focused campaign, developed with the education sector and other stakeholders, that aims to reduce the risk of bullying and other harmful behaviours occurring, similar to related national campaigns such as Stop it at the Start.⁷

Reducing the bullying risks and fostering safe, inclusive and respectful communities

Evidence and consultations clearly show that bullying and other harmful behaviours do not happen in isolation of other issues and drivers. A National Standard should be further supported by broader, complementary actions to address the interconnected risk and protective factors, including through a whole-of-society approach to address these issues.

Noting that bullying and other harmful behaviours have linkages with student engagement, attendance and mental ill-health and wellbeing, the Review highlighted opportunities for more cohesive action across these areas. This can be framed around a focus on student wellbeing for learning and engagement, in line with the related national priority areas in the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025–2034*.⁸

Continued cross-portfolio action is also needed to promote inclusion, address discrimination, and support safe and positive environments and mental health and wellbeing, building on existing commitments and work in these areas. This will help embed a whole-of-society approach to preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours, reducing risks and supporting positive environments. This includes cross-sector action on emerging technologies that facilitate online harms; gender equality; mental health and wellbeing; and inclusion – leveraging on existing commitments and frameworks in these areas, such as the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*.⁹

To ensure responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours remain contemporary and based on the best possible evidence within the rapidly



evolving digital and wider landscape, there is a need for ongoing research on the drivers, prevalence, preventative approaches, impacts and related issues to inform future approaches. There is also a need to prioritise continuous improvement through data collection and analysis, evaluation, and regular reviews of implementation of the recommendations from this report, to ensure that Australia's anti-bullying actions are being implemented and adhered to in schools, remain suitably targeted to achieve change, and adapt to emerging issues.

There are also opportunities to consider the best targeting of investment on measures that address bullying and other harmful behaviours and their risk and protective factors, to support longer term implementation and benefits.

The above core elements underpin the recommendations of the Review, which include measures to help take a National Standard from a concept to on-the-ground meaningful action and results. Together, the recommendations of this Review form a clear, strong and achievable plan to strengthen nationwide efforts on bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools for immediate and long-term benefits.

The co-chairs recognise that Education Ministers are responsible for decision and implementation planning in relation to the recommendations from this Review. This report is presented to Education Ministers with optimism that informed and critical collaborative action can be taken forward on developing and implementing a new principles-based National Standard that will drive and achieve genuine change.

Suggested National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools

A National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools

A National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools provides the framework for all school systems and schools to establish shared national expectations and actions and provide confidence that no matter where a student goes to school, bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (referred to as bullying and other harmful behaviours) will be appropriately addressed and the school workforce supported to take appropriate action.

The National Standard considers bullying to be within a continuum of harmful behaviours and negative interpersonal behaviours, whether physical or psychosocial, that are counter to creating a safe learning environment.

The National Standard comprises interconnected principles-based elements, set out below, which should be implemented together to effectively prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Standard 1:

Consistent anti-bullying requirements

School systems implement explicit and dedicated action to build positive and respectful school community cultures, to ensure bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted, appropriate and timely action is taken, and students' right to education and a safe learning environment is upheld.

This involves implementing and adhering to all the interconnected elements of the National Standard in a way that is appropriate for the unique local school context.

Standard 2:

Whole-of-school and locally tailored approaches

Schools implement a whole-of-school approach to preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours, involving the whole school community – students, parents and carers, the school workforce and wider school community – working together against bullying and other harmful behaviours, upholding shared expectations and creating a positive and safe learning environment. This includes:

- ▶ Developing and implementing school-based anti-bullying policies and processes in partnership with students, parents and carers, and the school workforce, for their local school context.
- ▶ Ensuring the school community has access to information and opportunities to support and contribute to anti-bullying actions.
- ▶ School leadership driving and embedding anti-bullying and behavioural expectations throughout school operations and culture.
- ▶ Considering and addressing the unique needs of the local school context, including the unique and intersecting needs of diverse student groups and school staff including First Nations people, those who identify as LGBTIQ+, people with disability, and other groups experiencing additional risk factors such as women and girls.
- ▶ School systems assisting schools to deliver this through appropriate leadership and supports.

Standard 3:

Create clarity and confidence in school anti-bullying action

All school systems and schools have visible and transparent anti-bullying policies and processes in place and are accountable for timely and appropriate actions. This includes:

- ▶ Anti-bullying policies and processes being publicly available and accessible and clearly specifying processes on how to report an incident; how schools will manage and communicate their actions; what supports are available; and what escalation steps can be taken.
- ▶ All school systems and schools make reasonable effort to initiate a response to any observed or reported harmful behaviour, including bullying, within two school days of becoming aware of the behaviour. Initial responses involve early safety and support planning and action to prevent further harm and initial communication actions, recognising further time may be required to fully address the issue.

- ▶ School systems and schools communicating what actions have been taken, and the reasons for those actions, to those involved or impacted, to the greatest extent possible while maintaining privacy responsibilities.
- ▶ Schools keeping records outlining steps taken against the school's anti-bullying policy and procedures.
- ▶ School systems and schools reviewing their anti-bullying policies and processes in 2027 and routinely thereafter to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are having the intended impact.

Standard 4:

Intervening early and appropriately

All school systems and schools implement an evidence-based continuum of prevention, early proactive intervention and response action on bullying and other harmful behaviours. This includes:

- ▶ Prioritising primary prevention and proactive early intervention action to stop bullying and other harmful behaviours from occurring and escalating.
- ▶ Ensuring response actions are trauma-informed, relationship-focused, justifiable and tailored to the unique circumstances involved.
- ▶ Ensuring all those involved in, or affected by, an incident are supported, including ensuring wellbeing supports are available for students and staff.
- ▶ Supporting students to understand the cause and impacts of their behaviour with a view to ending the cycle of bullying and other harmful behaviours.
- ▶ Providing clear and fair escalation pathways where interventions have not effectively resolved an incident.
- ▶ School systems ensuring their schools have access to information and guidance to support implementation of evidence-based and trauma-informed prevention, early intervention and response action.

Standard 5:

Support the school workforce

School systems and schools ensure school leaders, educators and non-teaching staff are empowered and equipped to effectively prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours and to support a positive and safe learning and working environment. This includes:

- ▶ Providing trauma-informed professional development on bullying and other harmful behaviours, risk and protective factors, and appropriate prevention and response action.
- ▶ Ensuring the school workforce is given the time needed to undertake professional development and contribute to bullying and other harmful behaviour prevention and response activities.
- ▶ Ensuring the school workforce understands the school's policies and processes to follow and has access to resources and guidance to help them be accountable and take appropriate action.
- ▶ Providing support for staff impacted by or responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Standard 6:

Reducing risks and fostering safe, inclusive and respectful communities

School systems and schools take action to:

- ▶ Address the broader risk and protective factors influencing bullying and other harmful behaviours, including through:
 - age, diversity, culturally and developmentally appropriate education on respectful relationships, social and emotional skills, digital safety and citizenship
 - explicit teaching on bullying and other harmful behaviours
- ▶ Ensure continual improvement, including through data collection and analysis, evaluation and research to ensure Australia's anti-bullying actions remain suitably targeted to achieve change and adapt to emerging issues.





Bullying in schools – Moving toward a new National Standard

Current Challenges	Vision for a Future System	Transformative Action
▶ Bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools are not being addressed consistently. ▶ A lack of shared, contemporary understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours and their impacts can make it difficult to take unified and appropriate action. ▶ Some young people and parents/carers are feeling dismissed, unsupported or unclear about what schools are doing to act on bullying and other harmful behaviours.	→ ▶ Students’ rights to education and a safe learning environment are upheld. ▶ Australian schools are safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments in which bullying and other harmful behaviours are prevented and addressed. ▶ A shared understanding so everyone has the same intentions and plays a role to help stop or act on bullying and other harmful behaviours. ▶ Confidence that timely and appropriate action will be taken on all harmful behaviours, no matter where a student goes to school.	← ▶ Set clear and consistent standards across all schools that bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted and that action will be taken. ▶ Expectations that every school has procedures in place to implement the National Standard, and to be accountable for timely and appropriate actions; includes having clear and visible processes on how to report an incident of harmful behaviour and how schools will manage and communicate their actions and supports available.
▶ There can be limited involvement of students, parents/carers and the school workforce in developing and implementing anti-bullying policies and practices, which can limit the appropriateness of existing approaches and opportunities for whole-of-school action. ▶ There can be a lack of general respect, kindness and empathy in day-to-day behaviours, leading to problematic cultures and relationships in school environments and society. ▶ Certain groups of students are disproportionately impacted by bullying and other harmful behaviours, such as First Nations peoples and students with disability.	▶ School-based anti-bullying expectations and measures are developed in partnership with students, parents/ carers, and the school workforce so they meet the needs of the local school community, and the community can work as one against bullying. ▶ Everyone in the school community is expected to treat all others with respect, kindness and empathy and act against harmful behaviours, including through a culture of speaking up, seeking help and supporting each other. ▶ Anti-bullying approaches are trauma-informed, culturally safe/ appropriate and tailored towards the local school context and student population.	▶ Provide targeted information on bullying and other harmful behaviours to the school community, including students and parents/carers, so they can be actively involved in developing and supporting actions, targeted to their unique school context, including through being positive and safe upstanders. ▶ School leadership drives and embeds the standard and behavioural expectations on bullying and harmful behaviours through school operations and culture. ▶ Schools consider and address the unique needs of their student populations and wider communities, including through tailored approaches where appropriate.

Current Challenges

- There can be uncertainty about what are effective anti-bullying practices, and not enough focus on prevention and early intervention, leading to concerning behaviour occurring, escalating or not being resolved, and students not feeling supported.

Vision for a Future System

-
- The full range of harmful behaviours are addressed, including emerging issues such as deepfakes and other online harms.
 - Prevention and early intervention are prioritised to stop bullying behaviours from occurring and escalating at the start.
 - Response actions are trauma-informed, relationship-focused, justified and tailored to the unique circumstances involved.
 - Students who engage in bullying and other harmful behaviours are supported to understand the cause and impact of their behaviour with a view to ending a cycle of bullying.
 - All students have access to appropriate wellbeing supports.

Transformative Action

- ←
- Clear guidance is provided to schools on implementing prevention, early intervention and response actions which are trauma-informed and supported by evidence.
 - Systems and schools take a strong prevention approach to reduce the risk of bullying and other harmful behaviours occurring. Every school has wellbeing support available for students and staff, and clear information on how to access these supports.

- The school workforce can feel under-prepared and under-supported to deal with bullying and harmful behaviours.

- School leaders, teachers and other staff are empowered and equipped to effectively act on bullying and other harmful behaviours and lead cultural change for their school community.
- The school workforce is given time to complete professional development and contribute to bullying prevention and response activities, to support positive gains for individual students, the broader classroom environment, and workload pressures.
- School staff impacted by or responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours are safe and supported.

- Dedicated professional development on trauma-informed practices, resources and support is provided to the school workforce to build their skill and confidence in managing bullying and other harmful behaviours (including deepfakes and online harms) and to support a positive learning environment.
- School workforce is informed of clear and consistent school policies and processes to follow in managing bullying and other harmful behaviours.
- Wellbeing supports are available for school staff impacted by or responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Current Challenges	Vision for a Future System	Transformative Action
▶ Action at the local school level could be further supported by whole-of-system actions. ▶ Limited data to inform actions and decisions.	→ ▶ Anti-bullying expectations are promoted and embedded at all opportunities through the education sector and kept up to date to be contemporary and fit for purpose. ▶ Research and data are available and actively used to inform actions, evaluate impact and identify areas for improvement.	← ▶ Education Authorities ensure their schools are implementing and adhering to the standards through their local school anti-bullying policies and procedures. ▶ Implementation of anti-bullying standards and actions is regularly reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are having the desired impact, and continually refined and improved based on data and evidence. ▶ Growing the national evidence base through research and data collection to inform trends and action on emerging issues. ▶ System-wide opportunities are continually identified, including boosting education on social, emotional, empathy and relationship issues through the Australian Curriculum.
▶ Surrounding risk and protective factors that can impact bullying and other harmful behaviours are not consistently being considered or cohesively addressed. ▶ Opportunities for further whole-of-society action to reduce the risks of bullying and other harmful behaviours occurring, and foster safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments.	▶ Action is taken to understand and address surrounding risk and protective factors (for example, mental health and discrimination), recognising that bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools does not happen in isolation of wider factors. ▶ A whole-of-society approach is in place to reduce the risks of bullying and other harmful behaviours occurring and foster safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments.	▶ Targeted, integrated efforts are taken to address broader societal factors that can reduce the risks of bullying and other harmful behaviours occurring, support constructive responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours, contribute to a positive learning culture and environment, and to proactively address emerging issues. ▶ A primary prevention and behaviour change focused public awareness approach is applied to build societal understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours, and its impacts and empower the community to contribute to cultural change.

Recommendations



1. Education Ministers commit to actions and reforms that set a National Standard for every Australian school to be a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment where:

- a. bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (referred to as bullying and other harmful behaviours), as described in this report, are not accepted, and
- b. the school workforce – including principals, school leaders, teachers, education support staff, specialist support staff and health professionals – is supported to take appropriate action.



2. Education Ministers consider the suggested principles-based National Standard included in the report for implementation across all school systems.



3. The Australian Government lead transformative national actions, including:

- a. A targeted public awareness campaign, to be developed with experts in primary prevention and behaviour change, the education sector, the school workforce, and other stakeholders, to:
 - ▶ build community understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours and their impacts, including cyberbullying and image-based abuse
 - ▶ equip the community to contribute to cultural change
 - ▶ support any national implementation of this Review's recommendations, including the National Standard.
- b. Consideration through the next Australian Curriculum review cycle of opportunities to enhance education on social, emotional, empathy, respect and relationship issues to equip students with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to understand and prevent harmful behaviours from occurring.



4. Education Ministers, school systems, and school leaders support every school across Australia to implement clear, transparent, trauma-informed and responsive anti-bullying policies and procedures that:

- a. Include a requirement that schools make reasonable effort to initiate safety and support planning and communication in response to observed or reported bullying or other harmful behaviours, within two school days of becoming aware of the behaviour, recognising further time may be required to fully address the issue.
- b. Are developed for their local school context in partnership with students, parents and carers and the school workforce.



5. Education Ministers commit to actions to empower and equip school communities to work together to prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours and build safe and positive environments, including:

- a. Trauma-informed training and resources for school leaders, teachers, teaching support staff, allied health and specialist staff on preventing and responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours.
- b. Targeted resources on addressing cyberbullying, deepfakes and online harms, developed in consultation with the eSafety Commissioner.
- c. Resources to help and support students, upstanders (those supporting others at risk of being harmed) and families, including families of students who have experienced or engaged in bullying and other harmful behaviours.
- d. Ensuring the risk factors and needs of local school populations are fully considered, including the unique and intersecting needs of diverse student groups and school staff including First Nations people, those who identify as LGBTIQ+, people with disability, and other groups experiencing additional risk factors such as women and girls.



6. Education Ministers, school systems and school boards support local school action by providing:

- a. Support for schools to analyse student-level data to enable the identification of bullying-related risks within their school communities to help inform targeted school-level prevention, early intervention and response and support activities, and to support continual improvement of approaches.
- b. Clear guidance on evidence-based, whole-of-school and trauma-informed responses that help schools intervene early and appropriately to prevent the development and/or escalation of harmful behaviours.
- c. Structured initiatives that provide all students with appropriate support, experiences, teaching and resources to positively and confidently engage in learning.
- d. Targeted and evidence-based approaches that help support and change behaviours of students engaging in bullying and other harmful behaviours, including supporting the schools to work with parents/carers to cultivate their child's prosocial behaviours.



7. Education Ministers commit to continual improvement in addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours, including:

- a. Reviewing implementation of these recommendations in 2027 and routinely thereafter to ensure Australia's action remains suitably targeted to achieve change and is being implemented and adhered to in schools and the school workforce remains informed and supported to take appropriate action.
- b. Identifying opportunities to build the national evidence base through research and data collection on risk factors, trends and impacts of actions to adapt to emerging issues.



8. Education Ministers note that preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours goes beyond the education setting and engage with other relevant portfolio Ministers to support a whole-of-society approach including to address broader risk factors and support safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments, including through linkages with the health, community and communication sectors.



About the Review

Purpose of the Review

The Australian Government Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP, announced the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review (the Review) on 16 February 2025 and the appointment of Dr Charlotte Keating and Professor Jo Robinson AM as co-chairs to lead the Review.

The Review was established in recognition of the increasing incidence of bullying and cyberbullying affecting school students and the significant detrimental impacts this has on all involved. It was also in recognition of the tragic consequences bullying can have, including young Australians taking their lives after experiencing bullying.

The school sector has been working to address bullying and other harmful behaviours and there are many examples of good practice and effective management on the ground. However, this has not been consistent across Australia and there is a call to improve understanding and supports to address bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (referred to as bullying and other harmful behaviours throughout this report) in a school context.

The overarching purpose of the Review was to examine what is working and what needs strengthening and provide advice on options for the development of a consistent National Standard for responding to bullying and its underlying causes in schools.

The Terms of Reference for the Review (at Appendix A) included providing Education Ministers with:

- 1 An overview of relevant research and evidence on best practice in relation to preventing and responding to bullying in school contexts – including addressing bullying behaviours and reducing underlying causes.
- 2 A stocktake of interventions that address bullying that are in place in Australian schools.
- 3 A desktop review of the effectiveness of different types of interventions to address bullying behaviours and support individuals who have been bullied.
- 4 Details of possible models for a consistent National Standard for responding to bullying and its underlying causes in school contexts.
- 5 Advice on what a consistent National Standard to address bullying should comprise, which may include principles for proactive procedures, data collection, communication, feedback processes and intervention mechanisms and escalation pathways, and other features such as considerations for responding to bullying of specific cohorts such as students with disability.
- 6 Advice on how the success or otherwise of a consistent National Standard could be determined.

The Review was mindful that bullying and other harmful behaviours are influenced by broader risk and protective factors and cannot be addressed without considering these complex and interconnected issues.

Bullying and other harmful behaviours, including cyberbullying, also occurs outside school gates and requires action that extends beyond the school sector and the scope of the Review, including from governments, other agencies and services, families and communities. Review consultations reinforced that 'it takes a village' to prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours.

How the Review was conducted

Dr Charlotte Keating and Professor Jo Robinson AM brought their extensive expertise, experience and passion to this Review.



Dr Charlotte Keating

is a clinical psychologist and has a PhD in Neuroscience. She works with patients across the life span with a particular focus on adolescence. Her areas of practice include anxiety disorders, mood disorders,

neurodiversity and school transitions. Her clinical work includes treating adolescents who have experienced bullying, those who have been bullied, and those who have bullied others.



Professor Jo Robinson AM

is head of suicide prevention research at Orygen, the Centre for Youth Mental Health at the University of Melbourne. Her work focuses on improving knowledge about the best approaches to reduce suicide risk among

young people, including in both educational and online settings. She has been a member of advisory committees on suicide prevention for both the state and federal government.

To ensure the Review captured input and views from a wide range of stakeholders, several methods of consultation were used to engage with young people; parents and carers; principals, teachers and school staff; school peak bodies; community and representative bodies; unions and government agencies (a list of stakeholders consulted is at Appendix D).

The Review was informed by extensive consultation and supporting activities including:



1,706
SUBMISSIONS

115 Consultations

ACROSS AUSTRALIA, INCLUDING:



72
ONLINE



38
IN-PERSON



5
HYBRID



Reference Group



Research

The consultation approach included engagement with students and families with lived experience of bullying and other harmful behaviours. The views and experiences of diverse communities were also captured through engagement with diverse groups of students and families, as well as organisations representing First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ+ communities, people with disability, and other groups.

The generosity and willingness of people and organisations to contribute and share their experiences with the Review was invaluable.

Public submissions

A public written submission process opened on 20 May 2025 and closed on 27 June 2025. This was announced by the Minister and promoted via stakeholder channels.

Submissions were informed by, but not limited to, questions outlined in a consultation paper, which sought advice on key issues including:

- ▶ What supports are available from schools to help a student and family dealing with bullying?
- ▶ What actions are schools currently taking to address bullying?
- ▶ What is working and what could be improved?
- ▶ What are some of the underlying causes of bullying?
- ▶ What else would help support school staff prevent and manage bullying?
- ▶ How could schools better prevent and address bullying, and how could this relate to a consistent National Standard on bullying in schools?

The Review received 1,706 submissions from individuals and organisations, highlighting the importance and reach of bullying and other harmful behaviours across the Australian school community. This included 187 submissions from young people, 1,061 submissions from parents and carers and 458 submissions from other stakeholders including teachers, school leaders, other school staff, education organisations and expert bodies. The submissions highlighted key themes and

priorities across a breadth of contributors. The names of organisations who agreed for their submission to be published are at Appendix E.

Online consultations

The co-chairs held 77 targeted online stakeholder meetings, including with school leaders, parent bodies, education unions, state and territory education departments, and community and representative bodies.

Jurisdictional visits

To ensure the diverse range of school contexts were considered, the co-chairs visited all jurisdictions, including major cities and regional communities. State and territory education departments supported the coordination of these important jurisdictional visits.

Reference Group

A Reference Group was established to further inform and support the Review with a breadth of interests and expertise, comprising membership from parent groups, principals, unions, government agencies, academics and peak bodies. The Reference Group served as a crucial sounding board for the co-chairs on the directions in the report.

Research

Specific research was also commissioned to further inform the Review and elements of the Terms of Reference, including:

- ▶ a review of the evidence drawn from meta-analyses and systematic reviews of anti-bullying best practices across a continuum of prevention, early intervention and response
- ▶ analysis of public documents from state and territory education departments, the National Catholic Education Commission, Independent Schools Australia and key education stakeholders to understand how the day-to-day operations of schools and school systems are guided and how policies inform actions.



What the Review heard

This section summarises key themes the Review heard on the prevalence, impacts and drivers of bullying and other harmful behaviours in Australian schools, and views and experiences of students, parents/carers and other stakeholder groups on current anti-bullying practices and how they can be improved.

Prevalence of bullying

The Review heard strongly that the impact of bullying and other harmful behaviours on Australian children and young people has reached devastating proportions. While there is limited nationally consistent data on the prevalence of bullying, and it is likely to be under-reported, available evidence shows:

- Over one in four Year 4 to Year 9 students (27%) report being bullied every few weeks or more often.¹⁰
- 70% of children aged 12 to 13 report having experienced at least one bullying-like behaviour in the past 12 months; more than 20% of those children had experienced this behaviour once a week or more.¹¹
- 53% of young people have been cyberbullied, with 13% told by the person engaging in the bullying that they should die.¹²
- Over five years from 2019 to 2024, cyberbullying complaints to the eSafety Commissioner increased by 455%.¹³ In 2024, 46% of complaints involved children aged 13 years or younger.¹⁴
- 84% of students who were bullied online were also bullied in person.¹⁵

- In 2024, Kids Helpline reported over 3,500 calls and online contacts about bullying, with the proportion of children experiencing bullying and reporting thoughts of suicide reportedly higher than at the peak of COVID-19 lockdowns.¹⁶
- Certain groups of students are more likely to experience bullying, such as (but not limited to) First Nations students, students with disability and students who identify as LGBTIQ+.¹⁷ For example, 57% of parents report their child with disability was subjected to physical, psychological, social or cyber bullying in school or had been excluded.¹⁸
- In 2022, Australia was ranked the second highest country (out of 24 countries) in student exposure to bullying.¹⁹

... the impact of bullying and harmful behaviours on Australian children and young people has reached devastating proportions.

Impacts of bullying

Evidence shows that bullying and other harmful behaviours have significant and long-lasting harmful effects for children and young people and their futures. For example:

- ▶ Students who are bullied are 3 to 6 times more likely to experience mental health issues such as depression, self-harm or suicidal ideation than peers who have not experienced bullying.²⁰
- ▶ Students who have experienced bullying are more likely to have poorer academic outcomes and attainment and struggle with transition points throughout life, such as adjusting to secondary school.²¹
- ▶ Bullying can lead to students refusing school, changing schools, becoming homeschooled or leaving education altogether.²²
- ▶ Bullying and other harmful behaviours contribute to lifelong impacts such as reduced community participation, poorer socio-economic outcomes, and poorer mental and physical health.²³
- ▶ Students who witness bullying can experience impacts such as moral distress and social anxiety.²⁴
- ▶ Bullying and other harmful behaviours are associated with economic and productivity costs for individuals and Australia as a nation.

Kids can't focus on algebra when they're too busy worrying about getting laughed at in the hallway, shoved at lunch or harassed online – Student Submission

Bullying and other harmful behaviours can also have tragic consequences, including young Australians taking their lives.





Risk and protective factors for bullying

Evidence shows that a range of complex and interrelated risk and protective factors are linked to bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools, as discussed throughout the report. Some known influencing factors include:

- ▶ Students experiencing mental health concerns, such as anxiety and depression, are more likely to be bullied and/or engage in bullying.²⁵
- ▶ Social and emotional skills affect bullying behaviour and the impact of bullying, including in relation to regulating emotions and problem-solving and relationship skills.
- ▶ A challenging home environment, experiences of trauma and/or lack of positive role modelling are risk factors.²⁶
- ▶ The school environment, including the maturity of anti-bullying culture and efforts and the safety, inclusion and connectedness fostered by the school, can help prevent or increase the risk of bullying.
- ▶ Cultural influences, such as misogynistic online content, can contribute to bullying and harmful behaviours.
- ▶ All forms of discrimination and inequality can contribute to the 'othering', discrimination, exclusion and bullying of students who are perceived as 'different' by their peers.

The Review also heard strongly that the evolving digital landscape is increasingly permeating learning environments and impacting bullying and other harmful behaviours among students and staff.

In Australia – together with many other nations – school-aged children are spending an increasing amount of time online and have access to mobile phones and other personal devices from a young age.²⁷ This makes the time and place in which bullying and other harmful behaviours occur increasingly fluid and not limited to the physical school environment, with the learning environment increasingly impacted by cyberbullying, online harms

and emerging digital technologies like deepfake image-based abuse (deepfakes). A deepfake is described by the eSafety Commissioner as 'a digital photo, video or sound file of a real person that has been edited to create an extremely realistic but false depiction of them doing or saying something that they did not actually do or say'.²⁸

There has been a recent increase in online abuse, with one in five Australians aged 8 to 17 years reporting being socially excluded, threatened or abused online.²⁹ These issues are also increasingly impacting the school workforce, as is discussed further in Priority Area 4.

Unlike verbal, physical and social bullying that occurs within the physical school context, cyberbullying and online harms are much harder to escape from and can cause particularly acute suffering through their invasive nature and ability to spread material rapidly and widely.³⁰ With 24-hour online access among many young people, and the cross-over into, or impact on, the learning environment, online harms are seen as a particularly complex challenge when addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours in a school context.

What the Review heard from different stakeholder groups

Bullying and other harmful behaviours are complex social issues that require action at multiple levels. Because of this, the Review co-chairs consulted widely to identify overarching themes to help paint a picture of bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools and what action could be taken, and to hear insights to inform advice on a National Standard. A snapshot of key themes heard across stakeholder groups is presented below and further reflected throughout the report.

The direct representations of students, parents/carers and other stakeholders was critical to forming an understanding of the bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools today and to informing the direction of the recommendations in this report.

What is the reality of bullying for students?

The Review heard directly from school students via face-to-face and online consultations and through 187 written submissions from young people. Of these, 69% identified as belonging to a priority equity group, of which 19% identified as a person living with disability; 16% identified as LGBTIQ+; 13% lived in a rural or remote area; 7% identified as coming from an educationally disadvantaged background; and 6% identified as belonging to a First Nations people. Many of the students expressed gratitude and relief for the Review being undertaken.

Young people are feeling unsupported

Perhaps most prominently, students conveyed a sense of feeling ignored and dismissed by the systems and supports they thought were going to help them. Students noted instances where reports of bullying and other harmful behaviours were met with a perceived lack of action and follow-up and highlighted the mental health implications of not feeling validated or believed. Young people also expressed the need for systems and schools to listen to their individual experiences and not trivialise behaviours.

If I had someone who I could trust, I wouldn't have felt so alone. Schools should make sure every kid feels safe and happy to come to school
– Student Submission

The Review heard students can feel that responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours are often aimed at removing them, as the person experiencing the behaviour, from the situation or preparing them for future instances of bullying and other harmful behaviours. Overarching themes were the need for responses to be aimed at the person engaging in bullying or other harmful behaviours and the need for greater transparency. There was acknowledgement from some students that action may have been taken but they were never informed, which compounded their sense of fear, invalidation and distrust.

Start by actually listening when a student says they're being bullied. Don't treat it like a nuisance or something to "keep an eye on". Investigate it. Document it. Follow up. If a student had a broken arm, you wouldn't tell them to "just ignore it and hope it gets better". So why is it different with emotional wounds?
– Student Submission

A need for stronger guidance and messaging

A focus area was the importance of both students and teachers being able to identify instances of bullying and other harmful behaviours and being prepared to undertake effective follow-up actions. Students highlighted the need for more consistent and clear messaging around what bullying and other harmful behaviours are and what to do when they happen. Some suggestions were zero-tolerance messaging and harnessing school assemblies as communication levers. Students also suggested a need to improve teachers' ability to identify, respond to and escalate incidents appropriately, including cyberbullying incidents.

Young people must be equipped with the knowledge and strategies to recognise, report, and respond to cyberbullying before it escalates into a serious mental health issue – Student Submission

Mixed experiences and opinions on response actions

Students provided diverse feedback on anti-bullying responses. For example, some students expressed a desire for parent and teacher involvement, while others identified this as unhelpful. Likewise, some conveyed a need for a quiet and safe environment, physically separate from those causing harm, while others said this made them feel isolated and angry. During consultations, yarning circles were referenced as a valued safe space within certain

schools. Some sought a mediated conversation with the student/s involved, while others found such a conversation forced, unproductive and inflammatory. The breadth of views reflects that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to bullying and other harmful behaviours, and action must be appropriate for the unique circumstances and individuals involved.

Student voice for improving culture and strategies

Students repeatedly raised that empowering 'student voice' would enable a more positive school culture and more effective policies. This includes through allowing greater student involvement in shaping and supporting policies and processes, ensuring students have agency in the way incidents are handled, and ensuring individual backgrounds and differences are considered.

 *One of the biggest forms of change I want happening in our schools is that we have student representatives to help shape and create new antibullying strategies. (...) I want students' voices to be heard. I want our students to feel and know that their voices are important*
– Student Submission

Importance of teachers and other school staff modelling respect

Submissions from students highlighted concerns around bullying and other harmful behaviours from teachers, with one in 10 students stating a teacher had been racist towards them and nearly half of respondents reporting seeing teachers racially discriminate against other students. This was seen as authorising further bullying and other harmful behaviours, as the 'responsible adult in the room' was not promoting an inclusive school culture.

 *We are supposed to be safe in our schools. But if teachers discriminate, who do we go to?* – Student Submission

What is the experience of parents and families?

The Review also heard from the parents/carers and families of students who have been or are still experiencing bullying and other harmful behaviours, including through 1,060 submissions from parents/carers and consultations with parent bodies. The views of parents/carers had considerable overlap with those of students.

Need for consistent understanding and tailored and trauma-informed approaches

Parents/carers reinforced that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to address bullying and other harmful behaviours. A key theme was the need for a common understanding around bullying and other harmful behaviours by parents/carers, students and school staff, plus age and developmentally appropriate and tailored responses. The Review heard that parents/carers were particularly dissatisfied with schools when they failed to stop bullying and other harmful behaviours the first time they occurred.

Parents/carers also acknowledged that young people engaging in bullying and other harmful behaviours are likely experiencing pain themselves, with a need for individual, tailored and trauma-informed responses. However, parents/carers were less positive about restorative approaches, with some wanting to see stronger consequences or punishments for students who engage in bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Importance of whole-of-school action

Parents/carers told the Review there is a need to involve the entire school community in anti-bullying measures. They expressed a desire for education opportunities for themselves, to expand their capacity and help them to develop practical strategies, including a particular focus on cyberbullying. They also called for increased training to equip educators with the skills to de-escalate situations, intervene early and collaborate with families, and to address bullying and other harmful behaviours more firmly through the Australian Curriculum and classroom learning.

 *Encourage and facilitate parent-to-parent and parent-school communication as a primary prevention strategy, especially in the early years of schooling* – Parent/Carer Submission

Clear information and communication for greater trust

The Review heard that parents/carers and families often feel mistrust, uncertainty and disappointment regarding schools' responses to instances of bullying and other harmful behaviours. Submissions from parents/carers indicated that 95% had reported bullying to the school, but less than 10% were satisfied with the school's response and 43% reported that the school did not take any action. This dissatisfaction often stemmed from insufficient communication, with strong and consistent messaging from parents/carers around the need for greater communication around, and more timely responses to, reports of bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Parents/carers also emphasised the need for consistent and accessible information about relevant school policies, processes and programs.

 *It is essential that both the student and their family feel safe and supported (and are) kept informed at every stage (...). Common complaints are that schools often acknowledge the issue initially but fail to follow through or provide updates or close the matter without resolution. This leads to a breakdown in trust (...). A National Standard must require a structured, timely, and transparent communication process* – Catholic School Parents South Australia Submission

 *What families need in these moments is not just a definition, but a practical, transparent strategy for how the school will intervene, support all involved, and prevent future harm. This includes consistent communication, a defined process for follow-up, and access to support staff where needed* – Parents Victoria Submission

What did we hear from school leaders, teachers and staff?

The Review heard directly from school leaders and teachers, who confirmed that bullying and other harmful behaviours are pervasive and serious problems across schools in Australia. School leaders and teachers also showed dedication to addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours and highlighted examples of effective anti-bullying policies and leadership in practice.

Whole-of-school and community action

School leaders and teachers reiterated the importance of whole-of-community engagement, a shared understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours, student-centred and tailored supports, and clear practices.

The Review also heard that while the school workforce is uniquely placed to manage incidents of bullying and other harmful behaviours that occur in or impact the learning environment, they are whole-of-society issues that require the combined efforts of all parts of society to address. School leaders and teachers felt that it would be unrealistic to expect schools to singlehandedly solve what are whole-of-society problems, and that they also needed support to play their part in addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools.





Resources and time to address bullying

The Review heard of the dedication of many school leaders and teachers to preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours; however, it also heard that time constraints and the complex contemporary school environment limit their ability to proactively prevent and respond to these issues.

To help address these issues, school leaders and teachers called for further support, including relevant pre-service and ongoing professional development and free, practical information and resources on preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours and the surrounding influencing factors. School leaders and teachers also consistently noted that appropriate time allocations are needed for them to complete professional development and contribute to anti-bullying activities. They also highlighted the benefits of having counsellors, wellbeing officers and other experts available to support school responses. Teachers also noted the need for strong leadership and commitment from school leaders, as well as reinforcement from governments to assist them in managing and preventing bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Importance of effective policies and practices

Teachers expressed the need for policies to be evidence-based and adaptable for their schools. There were mixed views on approaches such as restorative practice; however, a key theme was that relying on punitive measures such as detention and suspension alone is ineffective. There were suggestions around extending the range of interventions available to teachers and further supporting students' social and emotional regulation and reflection skills.

Some school leaders and teachers suggested leveraging teacher standards and other existing frameworks to better integrate anti-bullying within broader school improvement efforts, and the importance of consistent data collection and program evaluation to inform decision-making and ensure interventions are working.

Safety and wellbeing of the school workforce

The Review heard there should be supports and training available to help teachers and leaders maintain their own wellbeing and mental health when experiencing or responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools. The Review also heard that school staff are experiencing bullying, physical violence, sexual harassment and emotional abuse, which can result in them feeling unsafe in the workplace and even leaving the profession. Deepfakes, online harassment and misogynistic online content are increasingly impacting the school workforce, particularly female teachers. The Review heard that action on bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools must also address the psychosocial risks directed at the school workforce.

 *The changing applications of technology are also changing the nature of online harassment. There have been numerous media reports of deepfake images being used for the character abuse of teachers and students across the country – Australian Education Union Submission*

What else did we hear, including from representative groups and community organisations?

A strong theme across all stakeholder groups was the disproportionate levels of bullying and other harmful behaviours experienced by diverse groups of students and the need for tailored and appropriate anti-bullying interventions. This includes interventions that are culturally safe and appropriate, trauma-informed, and promote inclusion and diversity across the school community.

Stakeholders noted that further support is also required to equip the school workforce to meet the needs of diverse students, including training on trauma-informed anti-bullying practice.

Data management and reporting that record instances of bullying and other harmful behaviours and measure anti-bullying policies and practices, including the impact for equity cohorts, were also flagged as crucial.

The Review heard of the need for student education and professional development for teachers to help them recognise harmful behaviours and improve early and proactive identification of students at risk. There is also a need to normalise upstander practices, and to take trauma-informed approaches to prevention and responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours.



[We need] greater support for schools to identify students who show signs of bullying others early on – before the behaviour becomes severe – and to provide those students not merely with a disciplinary response but with effective approaches to behavioural change. This is perhaps the most under-served area we have observed – Alannah and Madeleine Foundation and Dolly’s Dream Submission

The Review heard of the need for greater understanding of online experiences of young people outside of school hours as it relates to safety, wellbeing and the ability to engage in school life and learning. Given the crossover of bullying and other harmful behaviours in and outside of school, guidelines on roles and responsibilities of schools in this context was also considered necessary.

Bullying is now embedded in the interplay between physical and digital spaces. Social exclusion, image-based abuse, targeted group chats, and viral humiliation can begin in person and ripple across digital spaces (and vice versa). Failing to treat bullying as a seamless experience across these realms limits the effectiveness of any response – Project Rockit Submission

As outlined later in the report, the lack of an agreed understanding on what bullying is and is not was a common theme across all stakeholder groups.

Diversity and intersectionality

The Review repeatedly heard of the disproportionate rates of bullying, discrimination and other harmful behaviours experienced by diverse groups of students, including First Nations students, students with disability, students who identify as LGBTIQ+, and other students as discussed further in Priority Area 1. Stakeholders highlighted the need for trauma-informed, culturally safe and appropriate, strengths-based

and tailored approaches to meet the needs of these students, and the importance of applying an intersectional lens that recognises that individual students can experience multiple and compounding risk factors.

For First Nations students, stakeholders emphasised the need for trauma-informed and culturally safe and appropriate bullying prevention and response activities and to apply a culturally appropriate understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours that considers local cultural and kinship frameworks. They also noted the need for accessible and culturally appropriate resources on bullying and other harmful behaviours, including translated, plain English and low- or no-bandwidth options. Co-developing these resources with First Nations people was seen as critical.

For students with disability, stakeholders emphasised the importance of inclusion, to ensure these students are not 'othered' through unnecessary exclusion from school activities by school staff or students. Stakeholders also reported that students with disability are disproportionately impacted by punitive responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours, and that there is a need for appropriate professional development to support school staff in understanding the needs and experiences of this group. There were also calls for trauma-informed and strengths-based responses that are co-developed with students with disability and delivered in partnership with allied health professionals where appropriate.

For LGBTIQ+ students, stakeholders highlighted the isolation that this group can experience, particularly if their gender or sexual identities are not affirmed or respected. There were calls to increase the representation, visibility and affirmation of LGBTIQ+ identities in schools – for example through student-led inclusion and peer support programs, appropriate curriculum content, gender-neutral uniform policies, and activities to mark relevant awareness and advocacy days and events. Stakeholders also called for further professional development for school staff to understand the unique needs and experiences of LGBTIQ+ students.



Many of the key issues and suggested approaches raised through the consultations align with supporting research, as discussed throughout the report. The overarching conclusion of the Review is that there is a need for a multifaceted National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools, with key national priority areas outlined in the following chapters.

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harmful behaviours
experienced by diverse groups
of students ...



Moving towards a new

National Standard on Bullying in Schools



Bullying is not just something that happens in schools, but schools are places where we can intervene and provide support for students. All students and staff should be safe at school, and free from bullying and violence. That's why we're taking action to develop a National Standard to address bullying in schools.

The Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education³¹

This section sets out the key national priority areas that emerged from the Review that informed the suggested National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools (National Standard) and report recommendations.

Throughout this section, case examples are provided of some existing anti-bullying activities raised by stakeholders during the Review. These are provided for illustrative purposes only. The Review is not endorsing any specific programs or providers.

Priority Area 1.

The whole school community working together

Throughout the Review, stakeholders emphasised that there is no one-size-fits-all response to bullying and other harmful behaviours, and there is a need for comprehensive whole-of-school approaches that are appropriately tailored to the unique local school context. By a considerable margin, leadership and commitment to whole-of-school approaches is the area that submissions to the Review felt would have the biggest impact in addressing bullying (48%), with significant support for this across all stakeholder groups.

Whole-of-school approaches that engage the school community, culture and practices

Whole-of-school approaches to bullying and other harmful behaviours:

- ▶ engage and empower all parts of the school community, including leaders, teachers, other school staff, students, parents/carers and wider community members
- ▶ embed anti-bullying expectations and actions across the school's culture, policies, practices and communications
- ▶ include activities that are directly focused on bullying and other harmful behaviours, as well as ensuring consistent messaging and expectations are reflected in broader school materials and practices

- ▶ extend to adjustments to the physical environment of schools and supervision outside of classrooms to help prevent bullying and harmful behaviours from occurring and enable proactive and early intervention where they do occur
- ▶ ensure anti-bullying activities are relevant, meaningful, age and developmentally appropriate, consistent and ongoing, appropriate for the school community/ local context, and empower the school community to work towards shared goals.³²

Research shows whole-of-school approaches can significantly reduce bullying and other harmful behaviours and support long-term change. For example, a 2021 study found that whole-of-school anti-bullying approaches that include relevant policies, classroom rules, information for parents, and peer involvement

are significantly associated with improved outcomes compared to alternative models.³³ Stakeholders further emphasised the benefits of whole-of-school approaches in supporting cohesive school-wide action.

Evidence also demonstrates the most effective school-based cyberbullying prevention initiatives require whole-of-school sustained action involving all school community stakeholders.^{34, 35} The Review heard that empowering the school community with tools to encourage proactive, preventative engagement with young people both in schools and at home was paramount.

 *[There is a need to] embed bullying prevention into the daily fabric of school life, rather than treating it as a series of isolated incidents*
– KidsXpress Submission

Key contributors to a whole-of-school approach include strong and visible leadership setting and promoting expectations; empowering students, parents/carers and the school workforce to have a voice in the development and implementation of the school's anti-bullying efforts; building relationships across the school community; and equipping and empowering students to be positive and safe upstanders. The Review heard this is not routinely occurring and is an area where the National Standard can make a difference.

School leadership

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of strong and visible school leadership in driving the culture necessary to prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours. Studies further support the important role played by school leaders, suggesting that high-quality leadership has an important impact on creating a school climate that protects against bullying and harmful behaviours, and in spearheading anti-bullying commitments and processes.

For example, a 2017 review of school-based anti-bullying interventions suggested that to be effective, these should be communicated and actively supported by school leadership.³⁶ Research further confirms that whole-of-school approaches to bullying and other harmful behaviours can reinforce norms of inclusiveness and wellbeing but must be backed by the commitment of school and system leaders.

School leaders have an essential role in:

- ▶ setting expectations around anti-bullying and modelling those expectations to establish a positive, respectful, safe and inclusive school culture and environment promoting and modelling 'relationship-centred' interactions within the school community
- ▶ ensuring the school's anti-bullying approaches include comprehensive and transparent prevention, early and proactive intervention, and response and accountability measures
- ▶ ensuring a coordinated anti-bullying approach across the school
- ▶ providing all teachers and school staff with opportunities, resources and support to build their capability to prevent and respond to bullying and other harmful behaviours in ways that are appropriate for the local context
- ▶ supporting the wellbeing needs of students.

Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of school leadership, teachers and staff modelling respectful and inclusive behaviour to promote a culture in which bullying and other harmful behaviours are not normalised or accepted. This also helps to build trust and security among students and their parents/carers that concerns around bullying and other harmful behaviours will be appropriately addressed.

Empowering school community voice

Providing opportunities for students, parents/carers and all members of the school community to give input and feedback and/or be involved in the co-construction and implementation of the school's anti-bullying measures is critical. Stakeholders strongly called for further action in this space, including to further equip and empower school community members to contribute.

Evidence indicates that these approaches help to ensure that anti-bullying activities are relevant, meaningful and appropriate for the school community, while also improving outcomes.³⁷ For example, studies show parent/carer engagement in anti-bullying approaches is associated with reduced rates of bullying.³⁸ Despite this, only 28% of submissions from school contributors indicated their school's anti-bullying approaches were developed with student and community participation.

Empowering school community voice could include establishing dedicated advisory groups or other processes, or building on existing processes, to harness involvement, as well as supporting students' confidence and capabilities to contribute. This could also include empowering students to co-lead anti-bullying efforts and ensuring processes are in place to allow student and broader school community voices to feed into anti-bullying policies and approaches across school systems.

... studies show parent/carer engagement in anti-bullying approaches is associated with reduced rates of bullying.

Building strong relationships across the school community

Evidence strongly supports the benefits of fostering positive relationships between and among staff, students, parents/carers and the wider school community to address bullying and other harmful behaviours. A relationship-centred focus would see all members of the school community prioritise relationships, empathy and kindness in their interactions.

Research suggests that strong relationships across the school community build students' connectedness to school, reduce bullying and other harmful behaviours and increase social and emotional wellbeing.³⁹ This includes positive relationships between students and teachers and other school staff, with evidence indicating this is a protective factor against bullying.⁴⁰

Evidence further highlights the importance of strong relationships between schools and parents/carers, noting the critical role parents/carers play in influencing a child's vulnerability to, or protection from, bullying.⁴¹ Submissions to the Review also highlighted the important role parents/carers can have in supporting a child's response to bullying and other harmful behaviours, with young people who provided submissions most likely to state that reporting bullying to their parents/carers helped to address the situation.

Despite this, the Review heard that parents/carers often report not being engaged by schools, lack knowledge about bullying and other harmful behaviours, and feel unsupported when engaging with schools to resolve bullying and other harmful behaviours. Similarly, 19% of submissions from education and other stakeholders indicated there is insufficient support for, or engagement with, parents/carers.

 *Parent involvement is particularly important for preventing and responding to cyberbullying, which typically occurs outside of school grounds*
– Triple P International Submission



Suggestions to engage parents/carers in anti-bullying activities included:

- ▶ Resources to support a shared understanding and messaging on bullying, including examples of what is and is not bullying that are relevant to the context, to help with modelling of positive prosocial behaviours, and clarify reporting and response pathways.
- ▶ Accessible and plain language and, where appropriate, translated resource options. This could be supported through school systems providing templates or resources that can be adapted at the local level to suit local contexts and needs.
- ▶ Regular updates through existing school newsletters, apps and/or other communication mechanisms.
- ▶ Information sessions or workshops, including on specific issues such as cyberbullying and online safety.
- ▶ Dedicated programs or liaison roles to keep families and communities informed, connected, and empowered.

- ▶ Targeted resources for parents/carers to provide advice on what to do if their child has witnessed or experienced bullying or other harmful behaviours.
- ▶ Targeted resources and support on response options for parents/carers if their child has engaged in bullying or other harmful behaviours – for example, through talking with their child in a relationally safe way to understand the reasons and impact of their behaviour and support them to engage respectfully and positively.

Submissions, particularly from teachers, indicated these strategies could offer significant preventative benefits in relation to bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Family, friends and relatives were able to give emotional support and advice for how to handle episodes as well as reinforcing the message that it's never ok to be bullied – Parent/Carer Submission

Some stakeholders also noted benefits of partnering with the wider community beyond the school gates, such as local sporting clubs, community groups, faith groups and/or other prominent local bodies to support anti-bullying messaging.

Providing guidance and support for students to be upstanders

While there is no single definition of ‘upstander’, the term is generally used to describe a person who chooses to support a person who is being harmed.⁴² In the context of bullying and other harmful behaviours, this includes support through safe student-led, peer-based intervention in situations of bullying or other harmful behaviour. For example, the eSafety Commissioner describes four elements of how to be an upstander in online contexts:

- i. reach out to the person being bullied or abused;
- ii. call out the bad stuff online;
- iii. say something to the person being mean; and
- iv. call in other support.

The Review found that there is a need to further empower and equip students to stand up against bullying and other harmful behaviours and take on this upstander role, with students across various school levels calling for more support in this area. As one student contributor to the Review stated:

When someone speaks up, it shows the behaviour isn't acceptable and that others are watching. Say something simple like "That's not cool," or "Stop, that's mean." It doesn't need to be aggressive just confident and respectful
– Student Submission

Classmates learn short, safe scripts "that's not OK", "Come sit with us" and see those who intervene publicly affirmed, the social reward structure flips and bullying quickly loses its audience – Teacher Submission

Evidence shows the benefits of supporting students to be positive and safe upstanders against bullying and other harmful behaviours, and that upstander training can reduce rates of bullying through empowering students to identify how they can safely intervene and transform the social dynamics that can reinforce bullying and other harmful behaviours.⁴³ This can help reinforce the message that bullying and other harmful

behaviours are unacceptable, with peer-to-peer intervention signalling disapproval of the behaviour, which may be more significant to some students.

Elements of an upstander approach in this context can include:

- ▶ highlighting the positive impacts that peer support can have and encouraging safely intervening or reaching out to the peer who is experiencing bullying or other harmful behaviours to offer support
- ▶ highlighting and championing the courage it takes to intervene, which could be an incentive to some students to undertake this behaviour
- ▶ building confidence and capabilities to safely address bullying and other harmful behaviours within a peer group
- ▶ ensuring appropriate and safe reporting arrangements are available to encourage peers to report bullying and other harmful behaviours to schools.

Parents, educators and experts report that this peer-based approach is an effective way of encouraging pro-social intervention but that it requires conscious training to develop these skills in young people – it will not happen naturally.

Intervention isn't a natural reflex. It's a skill set (...) This turns bystanders into upstanders – not with vague encouragement, but with concrete tools
– Teacher Submission

There are a range of programs and strategies currently available that promote a whole-of-school approach. Examples are below.

While there is no single definition of ‘upstander’, the term is generally used to describe a person who chooses to support a person who is being harmed.



Case example:

Friendly Schools Initiative

The Friendly Schools Initiative is an evidence-based, whole-of-school social and emotional wellbeing support and bullying and cyberbullying prevention intervention. The initiative includes eight components: capacity building; a supportive school culture; policies and processes; key understandings and competencies; physical and social environment; family partnerships; classroom curriculum and teaching practice; and student voice and peer support.

Studies indicate the model is effective in reducing student bullying behaviours, including decreased observations of bullying, increased likelihood of students speaking to an adult in their lives about bullying, and improved levels of student wellbeing.⁴⁴ Further information is available at www.friendlyschools.com.au.

Case example:

Stand-Up Project

The Stand-Up Project is a student-driven program operating in schools across Australia and internationally, designed to empower young people and transform school cultures to prevent and address bullying. The project prioritises empowerment, agency and authentic voice. It includes peer-led education, empowering older students to teach and mentor younger peers, and engaging their teachers and families directly. In these ways, 'students are not merely passive recipients of behavioural guidelines; instead, they actively participate as stakeholders, defining behavioural expectations and collectively addressing challenges, thereby fostering genuine ownership and commitment'.⁴⁵

Evidence supports the benefits of the model, with 98% of teachers and principals reporting they believed participation in it would contribute to a positive school culture, and 88% of student participants stating they would be more likely to be an active bystander after the training.⁴⁶ Further information is available at www.thestandupproject.com.

Whole-school approaches that build a culture of inclusion and safety are most effective (...) When school leaders actively promote kindness and respect, and teachers are given time to know their students, bullying is less likely to thrive – Teacher Submission



Locally tailored and student-centred approaches

The Review also found that it is critical that whole-of-school anti-bullying approaches are tailored towards the unique context of the local school and its student population.

This recognises the diversity of Australian schools and the need to tailor approaches accordingly. For example, schools in rural and remote locations operate within an implementation context that can limit access to staff, local support services and alternative schooling options and can involve a smaller and often less diverse community.⁴⁷ While the objectives and expectations of a National Standard would remain the same, different implementation considerations would be required for these schools compared to a school in a metropolitan area.

Similarly, boarding schools operate in a unique implementation context, which would require consideration of risks and opportunities and of communication outside of school hours, and ensuring students have ongoing access to appropriately trained staff and support to prevent bullying and other harmful behaviours ensure their wellbeing.

The Review also heard of the need for schools to consider and address the unique risk factors for bullying and other harmful behaviours among their unique student populations. Evidence indicates that certain groups of students are at greater risk of bullying, including:

- ▶ First Nations students
- ▶ Students with disability and chronic health conditions
- ▶ Neurodivergent students
- ▶ Gifted students
- ▶ LGBTIQ+ and gender diverse students
- ▶ Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students and students of faith
- ▶ Students living in remote, rural or regional locations
- ▶ Students with lower socio-economic status
- ▶ Students living away from home or in out-of-home care

- ▶ Young carers
- ▶ Students at transition points, such as the onset of secondary school.

These risks can be compounded for students who identify across multiple population groups. For example, students with disability who also identify as LGBTIQ+ are more likely to report feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at school than students who identify as LGBTIQ+ and do not have disability.⁴⁸

For an Aboriginal young person in care, a CALD student with disability in youth detention, or a child navigating both trauma and religious discrimination, bullying is rarely about a single issue. It is about the cumulative impact of being consistently “othered” – Shona Reid, Guardian for Children and Young People (South Australia) Submission

Schools should work to address the additional, intersecting risks faced by diverse groups of students, including by working to understand how bullying and other harmful behaviours manifest for them and what an appropriate response looks like. This suggestion was strongly put forward by parents/carers of children from priority equity cohorts who have experienced bullying.

Submissions to the Review suggested that more work is needed in this area. For example, 91% of young people who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander who provided a submission reported that their school's response to a bullying report was not helpful, compared to 79% who did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Similarly, 90% of young people with disability reported that their school's response was not helpful, compared to 77% of students who did not have disability.

The framework that is implemented must explicitly address how specific groups of students are disproportionately targeted by bullying, including First Nations students, as without this, these groups will remain vulnerable to the impacts of interpersonal racism happening in schools – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) Submission



Evidence also suggests that certain groups of students and school staff are at higher risk of specific forms of bullying and other harmful behaviours, with women and girls at greater risk of gender-based violence, harassment and abuse. For example, evidence indicates that women and girls are more likely to be the target of sexual and gendered abuse that happens online, with one study suggesting that pornographic videos make up 98% of the deepfake material currently online, 99% of which is of women and girls.⁴⁹ *The Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Act 2024* has created and strengthened Commonwealth criminal offences to target creation and sharing of non-consensual sexually explicit material online, including deepfake pornography, which is in addition to criminal offences relating to child abuse material.^{50, 51} Evidence also indicates that women and girls are at greater risk of experiencing sexual harassment, with 65% of young females reporting experiencing sexual harassment by 18–19 years of age, as compared to 43% of young males.⁵²

This was supported by submissions to the Review, which highlighted that female teachers and students are at higher risk of being impacted by deepfakes, other online harms and other harmful sexual behaviours. In addition to online risks, there is growing concern about misogyny and negative gender attitudes that can play out in school settings and create risks for gender fuelled bullying, abuse and other harmful behaviours. As highlighted by Collective Shout in their submission, in a 2023 study, teachers described ‘an escalating culture not only of sexual harassment, but of language and behaviours expressing a belief in male superiority and other misogynistic views among boys.’⁵³

Student and relationship centred anti-bullying approaches should consider and address the specific risk and protective factors relevant to the school population. Education systems and schools should:

- ▶ apply a whole-of-school approach, as outlined above, to support these considerations, including by ensuring effective engagement and partnerships across the school community to:
 - inform and implement locally tailored anti-bullying actions
 - ensure all anti-bullying policies and processes are student and relationship centred, strengths-based, accessible, inclusive, trauma-informed, age and developmentally appropriate, culturally safe and appropriately targeted for the local school context
- ▶ apply an intersectional approach, recognising that an individual can experience multiple and compounding risk factors
- ▶ consider the unique needs and experiences of diverse groups of students, such as the:
 - impacts of intergenerational trauma on the experiences of First Nations students and the need for cultural safety and appropriateness, anti-racism actions and community partnerships
 - disproportionate impact that punitive responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours can have on students with disability, and the need for holistic, strengths-based and accessible approaches

- isolation that LGBTIQ+ students can experience and the need to destigmatise LGBTIQ+ identities through appropriate representation, visibility and affirmation
- disproportionate rates of gender-based violence, harassment and abuse experienced by women and girls
- ▶ deliver tailored approaches to meet the needs of specific groups of students – for example, the eSafety Commissioner's Be Deadly Online resource, which explores cyberbullying, sexting, digital reputation and respect in relation to First Nations cultures and was developed in partnership with First Nations people⁵⁴
- ▶ work to address discrimination and inequality in all forms and foster an inclusive and respectful school culture
- ▶ build student population considerations into broader school activities to address surrounding risks and to foster protective factors against bullying, as discussed further in Priority Area 5.
- ▶ Education Ministers commit to actions to empower and equip school communities to work together to prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours build safe and positive environments, including:
 - Resources to help and support students, upstanders (those supporting others at risk of being harmed) and families, including families of students who have experienced or engaged in bullying and other harmful behaviours.
 - Ensuring the risk factors and needs of local school populations are fully considered, including the unique and intersecting needs of diverse student groups and school staff including First Nations people, those who identify as LGBTIQ+, people with disability, and other groups experiencing additional risk factors such as women and girls. *(Recommendation 5c, d)*
- ▶ Education Ministers, school systems and school boards support local school action by providing:
 - Clear guidance on evidence-based, whole-of-school and trauma-informed responses that help schools intervene early and appropriately to prevent the development and/or escalation of harmful behaviours.
 - Targeted and evidence-based approaches that help support and change behaviours of students engaging in bullying and other harmful behaviours, including supporting the schools to work with parents/carers to cultivate their child's prosocial behaviours. *(Recommendation 6b, d)*

 ***An intersectional approach allows the underlying causes of bullying and discrimination to be addressed and ensures all students and staff have access to the kinds of tailored support they need – Our Watch Submission***



Relevant chapter recommendations

- ▶ Education Ministers, school systems, and school leaders support every school across Australia to implement clear, transparent, trauma-informed and responsive anti-bullying policies and procedures that:
 - Are developed for their local school context in partnership with students, parents and carers and the school workforce. *(Recommendation 4b)*

Priority Area 2.

Creating clarity and confidence in school responses

A significant theme from the Review was the need for greater clarity and confidence that bullying and other harmful behaviours will be acted on and managed in a timely and appropriate way. In other words, strengthening the transparency, accountability and timeliness of action.

The Review heard that school-based anti-bullying policies and procedures can be difficult for students and parents/ carers to find or understand, leading to confusion, mistrust and a sense of helplessness. The Review heard calls for schools to address this by developing clear anti-bullying policies and procedures together with their communities, publishing them on their websites, raising awareness of them through available communication channels, and regularly promoting and modelling them within their communities.

It is proposed that system- and school-based anti-bullying policies and procedures would align with the elements of the National Standard. It is also proposed that all Education Authorities monitor that their schools are implementing, adhering to and updating policies, procedures and prevention and response practices through regular checks and ensure school- and system-level reporting and analysis.

Anti-bullying policies

Anti-bullying policies and procedures vary across education systems. Some have standalone anti-bullying policies, while others include anti-bullying as part of broader policies on student behaviour and engagement. These system-level policies are intended to be translated into school-based policies and practices.

The Review heard that the maturity of a school's anti-bullying infrastructure affects the extent to which bullying and other harmful behaviours are normalised or left unchecked in the school community. Schools that do not have clear policies or expectations around bullying and other harmful behaviours are less prepared to recognise or address these issues, or to create an environment that reduces the chance of them happening. A new National Standard can provide this important framing to set anti-bullying expectations and inform actions across Australia.

There was a strong call for schools to develop policies and procedures together with their school communities that clearly explain school

processes around bullying and other harmful behaviours, including what bullying and other harmful behaviours are, how to report them, what steps will be followed, available supports, and how concerns can be escalated. While many schools already have good policies and practices, making them more visible and easier to understand will help build confidence and trust that the right actions will be taken. It also ensures that students, parents/carers and school staff have easy access to the information they need.

School systems could help strengthen school-level policies and procedures by providing guidance that aligns with the elements of a National Standard. For instance, they could provide templates to help schools carefully consider key issues and maintain consistency where appropriate, while still respecting local needs, as discussed in Priority Area 1. Examples already exist of system-wide supports that could be built on further.

To help embed school policies more deeply, schools could develop and maintain value statements or charters that clearly outline behavioural expectations for everyone in the school community and embed principles of kindness and empathy across the school culture. This would help to reduce uncertainty, set clear behavioural expectations across the school community and promote a safe, inclusive and respectful school culture.

When it comes to reporting bullying and other harmful behaviours, students often worry that asking for help may make things worse or lead to retaliation or other social consequences. The Review found that students should have access to multiple options for safely reporting bullying and other harmful behaviours and asking for help, which may include speaking directly to a teacher or other school staff member, using an online form or a dedicated email address, or placing a note in a drop box where students can leave messages discreetly or anonymously.

Some schools have already implemented reporting systems, with the most frequently mentioned by educators being Stymie, an online reporting tool that allows students or bystanders to submit an



anonymous notification whenever they witness or experience harm such as bullying.⁵⁵ The report, which can include screenshots or evidence of online bullying, is sent directly to school staff for follow-up. It was noted that tools like this can empower students who have experienced or witnessed bullying and other harmful behaviours to report them and reduce the fear of retaliation that often accompanies reporting.

While anonymous reporting systems were generally seen as a positive step, educators did raise some implementation challenges, noting that a minority of students sometimes treat the tool as a way to air minor grievances or to make retaliatory reports.

Anti-bullying procedures

A prominent theme from the Review was the need for timely, clear and appropriate action when a complaint or incident of bullying or other harmful behaviour occurs. Responding quickly and consistently to bullying and other harmful behaviours reinforces the message that these behaviours are not accepted and will be taken seriously. This is vital to students and their families when it comes to maintaining a sense of safety, belonging and trust with the school.

Responses that are implemented quickly to address behaviours, instigate an appropriate plan of action, involve communication with parents/carers, and offer education and support are the most effective ways to uphold students' safety and wellbeing when bullying and other harmful behaviours occur.⁵⁶

The Review found that bullying and other harmful behaviour response procedures should include:

- ▶ Following the school's defined procedures in all cases and making reasonable effort to initiate action to any observed or reported harmful behaviour, including bullying, within two school days of becoming aware of the behaviour. This should include initial safety and support planning; action to prevent further harm; and initial communication action, recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issues, and noting there may be other child protection reporting timelines to be considered.
- ▶ Commencing an unbiased investigation, regardless of the level of substantiated evidence.
- ▶ Providing a dedicated school contact person for all involved, including parents/carers as appropriate.
- ▶ Providing access to supports for all involved, including mental health and wellbeing supports.
- ▶ Implementing appropriate and proportional response actions, as discussed in Priority Area 3.
- ▶ Communicating actions, and reasons for the actions, to all involved (to the greatest extent possible within the limitations of privacy responsibilities).

- ▶ Clear escalation pathways for managing severe incidents and for raising concerns about the school's actions. This includes complaint pathways to a relevant person in the school or independent of the school if a student or parent/carer is not satisfied with the action taken.

Opportunities for continual improvement of the school procedures should be considered and progressed, including dedicated time for post-incident reflection and for de-identified whole-of-school learnings. Clear communication plays a key role in building confidence and accountability. The Review heard that nearly half of the students and parents/carers who reported bullying to a school felt that no action was taken. Others felt that the response was not strong enough or that they were not informed about what had happened as a result. It is essential to keep all students, school staff and – where appropriate – parents/carers involved in a report of bullying or other harmful behaviours informed about what steps are being taken, how long the process might take and why certain decisions are made.

While privacy rules may limit how much information can be shared, communication should still provide reassurance that the school carefully considered the situation, took action, and applied consequences and supports as needed. After the incident, schools should follow up with both the student who experienced bullying or harmful behaviour and the student who engaged in the behaviour. This follow-up should check on their safety and wellbeing, help prevent further harms, and determine whether more support or action is required.

If a school cannot fully resolve a situation, there should be clear pathways to external services or authorities. This ensures that every report of bullying and other harmful behaviours is addressed and that everyone involved receives the support they need.

Similarly, there should be clear and accessible escalation pathways for students, parents/carers and school staff if they believe the complaint or incident of bullying and other harmful behaviours has not been managed in line with the school's policy and protocol or with the National Standard. These escalation pathways should include



information on how to raise concerns with the relevant school system, ombudsman or equivalent.

Some feedback to the Review suggested suspending or expelling students who have engaged in bullying or other harmful behaviours. As discussed further in Priority Area 3, evidence shows that punishment alone is the least effective way to change behaviour. Instead, trauma-informed approaches that are relationship-focused and strengths-based are needed to create lasting change,⁵⁷ whether used alone or in combination with more punitive measures.

Anti-bullying reporting and data

The Review heard that 'reporting for supporting' would reinforce accountability action on bullying and other harmful behaviours and help embed a commitment to continuous improvement.

Schools should keep robust records on every report or known incident of bullying and other harmful behaviours. This includes details about the people involved, the type of bullying or harmful behaviour, the views and any evidence presented, and the actions and communication undertaken by the school, including timeframes. In effect, the record keeping would outline the steps taken in line with the school's anti-bullying policy and procedures, and support the school's

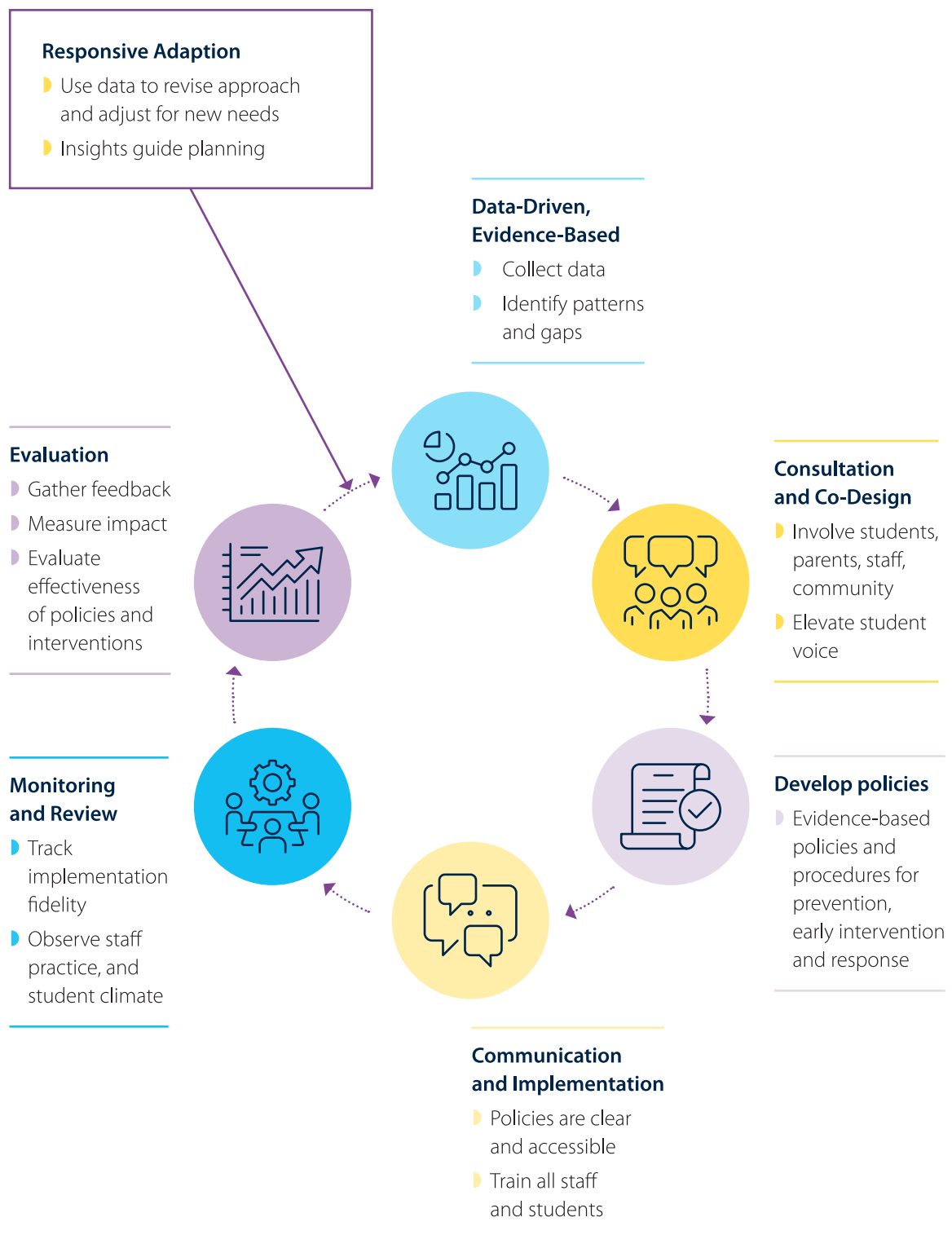
ability to identify risks, intervene early and proactively, understand the effectiveness of approaches, and make informed adjustments of policies and practices where needed.

When bullying and other harmful behaviours involve serious threats, violence or harm, schools may have a duty to report to external authorities, including in alignment with their existing mandatory reporting requirements. For instance, image-based abuse and the creation and/or sharing of deepfakes is a serious criminal offence in some states and territories.⁵⁸

Timely and thorough records of each report or incident of bullying and other harmful behaviours are also important for enabling fulsome reporting to police and/or other organisations as required including to meet state and territory mandatory reporting obligations where relevant. In addition, record keeping is essential where the bullying intersects with issues like workplace harassment; sexual harassment, assault and abuse; and/or discrimination.

Schools should analyse student-level data to identify bullying-related risks within school communities, to help inform targeted prevention, early intervention and response and support activities, and to support continual improvement, including monitoring impacts of action and adapting to emerging trends and risks.

Figure 1. Data-driven continuous improvement cycle



The monitoring and continual improvement lens would also be beneficial at a national level. The Review heard that data consistency is a challenge, with each education system collecting data in its own way. Even with strong and specific state-wide data collections in place, they generally differ in their measures and definitions, meaning an accurate national picture of bullying and other harmful behaviours is difficult to ascertain.

Further consideration is needed on data and research that could further inform and support national action on bullying and other harmful behaviours, including consideration of consistent national de-identified and disaggregated data collections to help:

- ▶ monitor national trends and risks and identify further intervention opportunities
- ▶ evaluate the impact of the National Standard and related policies and practices over time
- ▶ identify areas requiring further research.

While somewhat indirectly related to addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools, the Review heard about the role of media reporting of bullying when bullying contributes to youth suicide, and the harms and risks that can arise from repeated and/or sensationalist coverage or stigmatising students and school communities. Guidelines for sensitive and responsible media reporting, and for safe online communication following a suicide,^{59, 60} already exist and could be promoted, and a national stance developed through collaboration with relevant stakeholders. This would build on a commitment to a safe schooling environment and support schools and families to deal with the severe consequences of bullying.

Accountability for school workforce capability is discussed further in Priority Area 4.



Relevant chapter recommendations

- ▶ Education Ministers, school systems, and school leaders support every school across Australia to implement clear, transparent, trauma-informed and responsive anti-bullying policies and procedures that:
 - Include a requirement that schools make reasonable effort to initiate safety and support planning and communication in response to observed or reported bullying or other harmful behaviours, within two school days of becoming aware of the behaviour, recognising further time may be required to fully address the issue.
 - Are developed for their local school context in partnership with students, parents and carers and the school workforce. (*Recommendation 4*)
- ▶ Education Ministers, school systems and school boards support local school action by providing:
 - Support for schools to analyse student-level data to enable the identification of bullying-related risks within their school communities to help inform targeted school-level prevention, early intervention and response and support activities, and to support continual improvement of approaches. (*Recommendation 6a*)

A prominent theme from the Review was the need for timely, clear and appropriate action when a complaint or incident of bullying or harmful behaviour occurs.

Priority Area 3.

Intervening early and appropriately

The Review heard that to be effective, school anti-bullying approaches should include a continuum of evidence-based prevention, early intervention and response action. There were calls to increase efforts at the prevention end of the continuum and to provide information and guidance on evidence-based intervention approaches schools could apply.

Models such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) help guide coordinated support across three tiers based on student needs. In the context of bullying and other harmful behaviours this would involve:

- ▶ **Tier 1** – Universal, primary prevention actions targeting all students to reduce the risk of bullying and other harmful behaviours occurring and increase protective factors across the school community
- ▶ **Tier 2** – Early intervention actions to address specific risk factors and early signs of behavioural concerns
- ▶ **Tier 3** – Response and recovery actions for impacted individuals when an incident of bullying or other harmful behaviours has occurred.

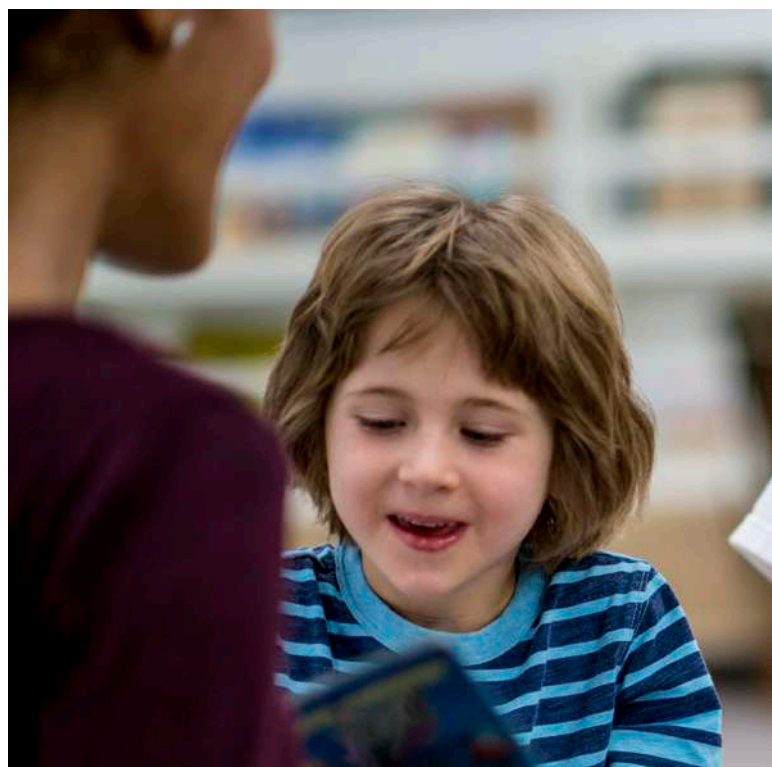
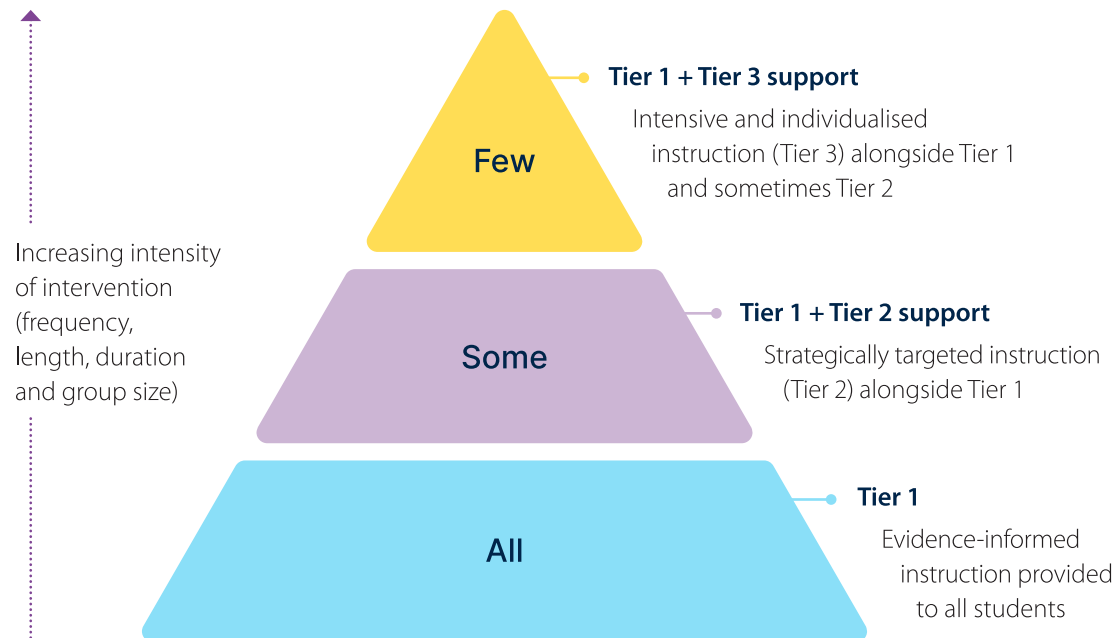


Figure 2. How tiers of support work in MTSS⁶¹

From the Australian Education Research Organisation



Evidence suggests that the MTSS model is effective in guiding action to prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours, including through supporting coordination of relevant activities, enabling the identification of behavioural concerns before they escalate, and ensuring students receive appropriate support.⁶²

Activities across the MTSS spectrum should commence from Foundation and continue across the school journey.

Multi-tiered systems based on risk and protective factors designed for different schools and different populations and individuals are vital
– Professor Lee Anne Perry AM
Submission

Tier one – Primary prevention

Universal primary prevention approaches seek to generate the culture change needed to prevent bullying and other harmful behaviours from occurring and increase protective factors across the school community. This includes actions to foster positive and inclusive learning and behavioural environments, with evidence indicating positive relationships, positive learning climates and a sense of belonging are protective factors against bullying and other harmful behaviours.⁶³

 *While schools are all active in addressing the issue of bullying and accept that specific antibullying policies, programs and resources are necessary and helpful, they do not regard bullying as a standalone issue, but as secondary to creating a safe and supportive school climate that values student well-being*
– Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia Submission

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of setting expectations and providing age and developmentally, diversity and culturally appropriate education in the following areas to equip students with the knowledge and skills to foster positive and respectful relationships, including in the online environment.

- ▶ **Social and emotional learning –**
This involves ‘developing understanding and skills to manage emotions, manage conflict and problem solve, establish positive relationships, develop empathy for others and feel good about oneself.’⁶⁴ Stakeholders emphasised the role of social and emotional learning in preventing bullying through equipping ‘students to handle daily challenges effectively, including recognising and addressing bullying behaviours in their peers’ (Independent Schools Australia submission). Evidence supports this, with studies showing that social and emotional learning can be an effective component of anti-bullying interventions.⁶⁵

- ▶ **Respectful Relationships Education –**
This involves ‘a holistic approach to school-based, primary prevention of gender-based violence, inclusive of school policy, programs and practices.’⁶⁶ Respectful Relationships Education can help prevent bullying and other harmful behaviours through ‘shifting the gendered drivers of bullying, harassment and violence at individual, school, system, policy and broader societal levels’ (Our Watch submission). Evidence supports this, with an evaluation of a pilot of Respectful Relationships Education in Victorian and Queensland primary schools finding that it helped shift student and staff attitudes around gender stereotypes.⁶⁷

- ▶ **Digital safety, citizenship and literacy education –** This aims to support students to safely, responsibly and respectfully engage with digital technologies, including through understanding and mitigating relevant risks.⁶⁸ Stakeholders emphasised the importance of up-to-date education in these areas to prevent and address cyberbullying, deepfakes and other online harms. This includes helping to ‘promote positive and respectful relationships online and empower students to protect themselves’ (eSafety Commissioner submission), with evidence supporting these benefits.⁶⁹

- ▶ **Explicit education on bullying and other harmful behaviours –** Stakeholders also called for explicit education to improve understanding of what constitutes bullying and other harmful behaviours and relevant risk and protective factors. For example, as the eSafety Commissioner’s submission stated, we need to teach cyberbullying, explicitly because ‘when students understand what cyberbullying is, know about the harms that can be caused, and are informed about sources of support, they will be better equipped to recognise and respond’. Evidence supports this, with studies suggesting that the most effective bullying and cyberbullying prevention programs include explicit education in these areas.⁷⁰ Stakeholders suggested that this education should also extend to promoting inclusion and diversity and highlighting the impacts societal power structures can have in contributing to the exclusion and bullying of diverse students.

- Behaviours for the learning environment** – Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of schools developing and upholding clear behavioural expectations for students and the wider school community. For example, setting and communicating expectations around respectful communications and the use of mobile phones and other devices, positively reinforcing pro-social behaviours, and utilising high-quality instruction and shared routines. Stakeholders noted that to be effective, behavioural expectations must be clearly communicated, regularly reinforced, and modelled in relationally sensitive ways.


Having dedicated class time during the week to speak and act upon how to treat others with the respect they deserve I think would be a beneficial way to educate school aged children
 – Student Submission

Stakeholders noted that some of the above forms of education – particularly digital safety, citizenship and literacy education – can be effectively delivered by specialist external organisations. However, this should be complemented by ongoing whole-of-school action around these core issues to ensure sustainable and long-term outcomes.

While the Australian Curriculum outlines expectations in relation to what all Australian students should be taught, regardless of where they live or their background, school systems and schools are responsible for the day-to-day delivery of education programs and the selection and use of educational resources. In doing so, they should ensure their teaching materials and approaches include a focus on addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours and their associated risk and protective factors.

Some stakeholders highlighted the value of frameworks such as Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL). Like MTSS, PBL provides a three-tiered approach to behaviour that reinforces expectations and teaches positive behaviours school-wide, aiming to create an environment less conducive to bullying and other harmful behaviours.⁷¹ However, recent evaluations found that PBL was not having a meaningful impact on student attendance,

suspensions or wellbeing in comparison to non-PBL schools.⁷² This suggests that PBL alone may be insufficient to address bullying and other harmful behaviours and that schools should supplement it with bullying-specific strategies.

Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of ongoing action to embed principles of inclusion, belonging, respect, safety and equity across the wider school culture, in line with the whole-of-school approach outlined in Priority Area 1. Schools can promote such principles, which will further support bullying prevention, in multiple ways such as:

-  committing to building a positive school culture and communication and modelling from leaders, teachers and staff
-  supporting students to develop positive networks and a sense of belonging, such as peer support, mentoring and buddy models, and pride networks
-  developing and upholding clear behavioural expectations and explicit values
-  empowering students to take active roles in promoting kindness, inclusivity and respectful behaviour and acknowledging and reinforcing these behaviours
-  marking inclusion and anti-bullying events such as Bullying No Way's National Week of Action, Do It For Dolly Day, NAIDOC Week and Harmony Week, and complementing these with ongoing activities.⁷³

Stakeholders also suggested that this work should be supported by broader actions at the systems levels. This includes a review of relevant learning areas of the Australian Curriculum and Curriculum Connections to ensure they provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills to help prevent bullying, and development of curriculum-linked resources to assist schools to incorporate this education.


The message that bullying is unacceptable must be embedded within a school culture that focuses equally on academic growth and building emotional and social competence within an inclusive caring school environment
 – Author and educator
 Maggie Dent Submission



Case example:

Rock and Water Program

The program is a physical activity-based youth development program that teaches self-regulation, self-confidence and conflict resolution through physical activities and metaphor – the idea of being like rock, firm and standing up for oneself, or like water, flexible and cooperative, in different situations. The program aims to decrease bullying and aggressive incidents and improve students' social/emotional outcomes. Because of its active, experiential nature, it tends to engage students who might not respond to classroom-based social skills lessons.⁷⁴

Case example:

'You Can Sit With Me'

This initiative involves students wearing bright yellow *You Can Sit With Me* wristbands, to signal that they are open to anyone, especially lonely or excluded peers, to sit with them or talk to them. The initiative aligns with the principles of the *Australian Student Wellbeing Framework*, which emphasises inclusive, supportive school communities. Many schools have adopted it as part of their whole-of-school wellbeing plan and it serves as a preventative strategy by fostering a culture of inclusion.⁷⁵

Tier two – Early and proactive intervention

The Review heard of the importance of early and proactive intervention approaches to enable schools to identify and address risk factors and early signs of behavioural concerns before they progress into more harmful behaviours.

Schools should embed early and proactive intervention approaches appropriate for their unique context, such as:

- ▶ training and support for teachers and staff to identify more subtle signs of bullying or emerging harmful behaviour, and clear processes to instigate appropriate action
- ▶ reviewing relevant information to identify potential needs for support, such as school attendance data, noting that evidence indicates strong links between bullying and attendance issues and risk of disengaging⁷⁶
- ▶ using specific assessment tools to support school staff to understand students' wellbeing and proactively identify and address any risks and needs for additional support
- ▶ targeted supports for higher-risk student cohorts, and at specific points in time, such as the onset of secondary school or transitioning to a new school
- ▶ promoting a help-seeking culture to empower students to seek support when needed
- ▶ ensuring appropriate mental health and wellbeing supports are available to support early intervention, delivered in partnership with external services where relevant
- ▶ ensuring that every student has a clearly identified safe adult at school they trust and feel comfortable to approach and talk to about their experiences.

 *[We need] Evidence-based prevention and early intervention approaches, particularly in the early years of primary school, when many behaviours and attitudes are being formed*
– Alannah and Madeleine Foundation and Dolly's Dream Submission

Case example:

My Mind Check

My Mind Check is an evidence-based, innovative tool for early intervention and response that enables schools to conduct a point-in-time survey of students' wellbeing and identify those who might be struggling, including those having difficulties with peer relationships or bullying concerns. Students are able to self-report on aspects of their mental health and wellbeing through age-appropriate multiple choice, non-diagnostic questions. The questions are designed to identify risk factors, highlight early warning signs of a student developing mental health challenges, and identify protective factors, where a student is feeling supported and resilient. The platform helps schools to proactively identify students in need of support, even if the student has not come forward to report bullying. Resources are also provided to assist the school in tailoring their support to the needs of the student.⁷⁷

Tier three – Response and recovery

The Review heard that responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours should be proportionate and defensible, prioritise safety and be based on the best available evidence. There is no one ‘right’ way to respond. Schools should consider the unique circumstances of each incident – including the severity, duration and drivers, as well as the age, developmental stage and backgrounds of the students involved, including diversity considerations – and tailor their responses accordingly.

The Review heard that the school workforce has access to a range of evidence-based information on bullying and other harmful behaviour responses, including from Bullying No Way and the eSafety Commissioner, as well as other initiatives and supports available across school systems.⁷⁸ However, the Review also heard that the workforce can feel overwhelmed by the breadth of information available and could benefit from clearer guidance on evidence-based responses or practical tools such as a clearinghouse of endorsed evidence-based programs or approaches. Comparable models are in place, such as the Victorian Government’s Schools Mental Health Menu, which provides a curated list of evidence-based interventions and a planning tool to help schools implement them.⁷⁹

Stakeholders emphasised the need for accountable responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours, with some suggesting harder consequences for those who engage in repeated or more severe bullying, such as suspensions and expulsions. However, while punitive approaches can be appropriate in some circumstances – particularly when used in combination with trauma-informed and relationship-focused models – purely punitive approaches are often ineffective. This is because they can risk further disengaging students from school by failing to address the underlying causes of bullying and other harmful behaviours and not supporting opportunities to repair relationships (or for relationship neutrality or other appropriate outcomes that are trauma-informed).⁸⁰

As a result, when used alone, these approaches increase the risk for further harm for all involved in an incident of bullying or other harmful behaviours and for academic achievement, non-attendance and early school leaving.⁸¹ There are also potential impacts for the school and broader community, as students who engage in bullying and other harmful behaviours are more likely to be involved in a range of additional anti-social and potentially criminal behaviours if the underlying causes are not addressed.⁸²

All stakeholder groups, including students and families impacted by bullying and other harmful behaviours, recognised that students who engage in bullying and other harmful behaviours often do so as a reaction to challenges in their own lives. They may be dealing with adversity or emotional issues, be reflecting learned behaviour or struggle with impulse control and empathy.⁸³ Evidence indicates that trauma and bullying and other harmful behaviours are closely connected, with students who engage in these behaviours more likely to have experienced trauma and students who have experienced bullying and other harmful behaviours at greater risk of experiencing long-lasting trauma disorders and symptoms.⁸⁴ Bullying and other harmful behaviours can be seen as a flag that a student needs help, and with intervention there are opportunities to potentially improve their life course and outcomes for the school community.⁸⁵

To address these issues, there is a need for trauma-informed, strengths-based, relationship-centred and, where safe and appropriate, restorative focused approaches that work to understand and address the causes of bullying – helping to end the cycle of bullying and other harmful behaviours.

 ***To effectively prevent and respond to bullying, schools must shift from reactive, punitive models to proactive, relational, and systemic approaches that address the drivers of bullying at their root – KidsXpress Submission***

Trauma-informed and relationship-centred approaches should be evidence-based and proportionate to the unique context of the incident of bullying or other harmful behaviour, and include:

- ▶ prioritising safety, wellbeing and recovery for all involved, including through immediate safety planning and appropriate mental health and wellbeing supports – delivered in partnership with external services where appropriate
- ▶ operating in a fair, unbiased and transparent way to build and maintain trust
- ▶ supporting student choice, including providing agency to students who have experienced bullying and other harmful behaviours and ensuring they are not disadvantaged by response actions
- ▶ engaging with parents/carers, where appropriate, including to help ensure appropriate supports and shared messaging are in place outside of school
- ▶ recognising and respecting diversity and how the unique backgrounds of the students involved can impact their experience of trauma and their support needs⁸⁶
- ▶ supporting students who have engaged in bullying to build social and emotional skills, such as through mentoring, coaching, education and/or appropriate group activities
- ▶ actively supporting students' reintegration following bullying and other harmful behaviour related absences from school
- ▶ follow-up monitoring of both the person who experienced bullying or other harmful behaviour, and the person who engaged in this behaviour, and ongoing access to mental health and wellbeing supports
- ▶ continued whole-of-school actions to build and sustain a positive and inclusive school culture.

It starts by understanding that the bully is behaving in a pain-based response to something and that more supports should be placed around the bully to help them navigate this and support them to reconcile with their peers – Parent/Carer Submission

Case example:

Berry Street Education Model (BSEM)

The BSEM is a whole-of-school educational model with a strong trauma-informed focus. Though not a specific anti-bullying approach, it demonstrates how a whole-of-school, trauma-informed approach can benefit student wellbeing, resilience, self-regulation and positive relationships with its focus on five key domains: body, relationship, stamina, engagement, and character.⁸⁷ By strengthening emotional regulation and relationship capabilities in all students, BSEM inherently addresses some of the root causes of bullying, such as impulse control or empathy, and can support both those who have been bullied and those who have bullied.

The Review heard that these approaches can also include restorative practice principles, where safe and appropriate. Restorative practice involves bringing together students who have engaged in and experienced bullying and other harmful behaviours to acknowledge what happened, understand its impact, and agree on steps to repair the harm and restore relationships.⁸⁸ The Review heard that the goal of restoration is not always relationship repair; it may be that relationship neutrality or arrangements to separate students are appropriate.

The Review heard that these approaches can be effective when used appropriately and with well-trained facilitators. To prevent further harm however, it is critical that these approaches prioritise student safety, wellbeing and agency – including through ensuring that all students provide full, informed consent and the process is supported by appropriately trained staff and access to mental health and wellbeing supports.



Support for students who have been suspended or removed from a class to re-engage with the school community and build the skills necessary to restore relationships and end the cycle of bullying and other harmful behaviours is critical. Without a reintegration plan, the student may feel stigmatised or struggle to fit back into school, which could trigger further disengagement and anti-social behaviours. The Review heard of the need for schools to have follow-up supports in place and to support reintegration with things like social skills training, linking the student with a mentor teacher, and/or involving them in a pro-social group activity such as a project to reshape their school identity.

A plan to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the student who experienced bullying or other harmful behaviours is also essential. This includes through ensuring that appropriate supports are in place, including following the return of the student who engaged in the behaviour to school or the class.

While the hope is that an effective continuum of actions will prevent or reduce the impact of bullying and other harmful behaviours, there can be tragic consequences including suicide. A supportive approach is crucial for the whole school community in responding to the loss of a young life in these circumstances. In 2012, a Suicide Postvention Toolkit for secondary schools was developed to guide schools following a student suicide.⁸⁹

The toolkit was compiled by headspace School Support, funded by the Australian Government and drawing on work from South Australian education sectors. This resource has since been developed into the Be You Suicide Postvention: Complete Toolkit and is available on Beyond Blue's Be You website. It provides a structured, compassionate approach for schools facing such a tragedy. Steps include:

- ▶ providing psychological support to students and staff
- ▶ communicating appropriately with the student's family
- ▶ addressing any contagion risk
- ▶ reviewing the circumstances to inform prevention.

Schools must be prepared to support their community in healing, learning and strengthening their approaches to avoid future harm.⁹⁰

Across each tier of the response continuum, stakeholders highlighted the need for appropriate mental health and wellbeing support. This recognises strong evidence indicating that students who have experienced, witnessed or engaged in bullying and other harmful behaviours are more likely to experience mental health concerns.⁹¹

Stakeholders also provided feedback that mental health and wellbeing supports in schools, such as school-based counsellors and wellbeing staff, can play a critical role in supporting resilience and recovery.



Relevant chapter recommendations

- ▶ The Australian Government lead transformative national actions, including:
 - Consideration through the next Australian Curriculum review cycle of opportunities to enhance education on social, emotional, empathy, respect and relationship issues to equip students with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to understand and prevent harmful behaviours from occurring. (*Recommendation 3b*)
- ▶ Education Ministers, school systems and school boards support local school action by providing:
 - Clear guidance on evidence-based, whole-of-school and trauma-informed responses that help schools intervene early and appropriately to prevent the development and/or escalation of harmful behaviours.
 - Structured initiatives that provide all students with appropriate support, experiences, teaching and resources to positively and confidently engage in learning.
 - Targeted and evidence-based approaches that help support and change behaviours of students engaging in bullying and other harmful behaviours, including supporting the schools to work with parents/carers to cultivate their child's prosocial behaviours. (*Recommendation 6b, c, d*)

Priority Area 4.

Supporting the school workforce

A well trained and supported school workforce is essential to preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours. This includes through equipping school leaders, teachers and staff to work with their school communities to ensure that students feel safe, supported and respected, and that bullying and other harmful behaviours are effectively addressed to prevent further harms.

The Review heard of the dedication of the school workforce and many examples of good practice to prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours; however, further capability and capacity building opportunities are required to strengthen action nationally.

This was highlighted through submissions to the Review, with young people who provided submissions indicating that teachers (53%) and other school staff (47%) could have helped to address a report of bullying. By contrast, few responses indicated that these supports did help to address a report of bullying. This suggests that additional capability-building opportunities for the school workforce, combined with appropriate time to complete them and contribute to bullying and other harmful behaviour prevention and response activities, could generate meaningful changes in students' experiences of school responses to bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Supporting the school workforce to effectively prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours can significantly reduce rates of bullying and other harmful behaviours and have positive influences on classroom management and learning experiences. The National Standard can help establish informed and clear school-based policies and evidence-based procedures with flow on efficiencies and impacts from school workforce actions.

Schools are doing vital work every day – but cannot do it alone. With stronger support for school leaders, greater community engagement, and a commitment to early, inclusive intervention, we can make schools safer for every child – NSW Primary Principals Association Submission

Workforce capability building

Studies show that capability building for the school workforce through appropriate professional development and initial education for teachers is associated with reduced rates of bullying and other harmful behaviours. A 2022 panel on teacher education highlighted the importance of embedding classroom management and responsive teaching in all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs.⁹² Supporting teachers to better understand bullying and other harmful behaviours, promote a positive and safe culture, and confidently intervene through ongoing professional development is critical.⁹³ Building workforce capability can include the following considerations.

- ▶ Throughout the Review, teachers and school staff, regardless of their years in the profession, reported wanting practical and trauma-informed advice and resources on anti-bullying interventions, including appropriate classroom behaviour management and respectful relationships education, and how to manage the evolving online environment. This includes through ITE and ongoing professional development on bullying and other harmful behaviours, including deepfakes and other online harms; risk and protective factors; and evidence-based and trauma-informed responses that are appropriate for the local context.
- ▶ Evidence suggests the benefits of professional development on practical skills such as emotional competencies, inclusive practices and direct intervention, and conflict management.⁹⁴
- ▶ Clear and accessible information on school anti-bullying policies and processes (discussed above in Priority Area 2).
- ▶ Appropriate content in the Australian Curriculum (as discussed above in Priority Area 3) and supporting resources.

- ▶ Consideration of opportunities to review the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and Australian Professional Standard for Principals to ensure they clarify bullying and other harmful behaviour related expectations, and to develop accompanying resources.⁹⁵
- ▶ Ensuring support is available from counsellors and other wellbeing staff who can provide the expertise needed to strengthen schools' anti-bullying responses and help alleviate the pressure on teachers and other school staff.

The Review also heard that schools need further guidance on how to manage deepfakes and other online harms. This includes clearly communicating the risks and legal responsibilities within the school community.

Targeted professional development could build on existing opportunities in place across school systems and help to strengthen the confidence and capabilities of the school workforce in managing bullying and other harmful behaviours, with flow-on benefits for individuals and the learning and school environment. Accessible capability-building options, such as self-paced micro-credentials on bullying prevention and response, should be considered.

 ***School systems must ensure that appropriate professional development is available for teachers and school leaders, that is during work time without cost to the participant – Australian Education Union Submission***

 ***Any standard should be supported by mechanisms that enable teacher and leader capability, including access to high-quality professional learning, role-specific guidance, and leadership development aligned with the Principal Standard and the Middle Leader Standards – Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Submission***

Supporting workforce capacity

Evidence indicates that schools operate in an increasingly complex landscape, in which they are expected to deliver a broader range of outcomes for an increasingly diverse cohort of students.⁹⁶ This includes supporting student health and wellbeing, engagement and attendance, digital safety, anti-bullying and broader outcomes – all of which contribute to the existing workload pressures faced by the school workforce.⁹⁷ Broader contextual issues such as the decentralisation of many schools and increasing focus on accountability, evaluation and results further compounds these pressures for school leaders in particular.⁹⁸

Studies point to the impacts such issues are having on school anti-bullying responses. For example, a 2023 study on Australian primary school teachers found that most identified that not having the time needed to effectively manage and respond to reports of bullying and other harmful behaviours is a major barrier to effective responses.⁹⁹

The Review heard that to support implementation of the National Standard and successful actions, the school workforce should be given appropriate time to contribute to anti-bullying activities. This includes dedicated time to undertake professional development, contribute to bullying and other harmful behaviour prevention and response processes, and reflect on outcomes and opportunities for improvement.

Stakeholders also noted that bullying and other harmful behaviours are whole-of-community issues and as such cannot be prevented and addressed by schools alone. While schools play a critical role in preventing and responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours that permeate learning environments, these issues require broader, whole-of-community actions to address. This includes through schools having appropriate processes in place to support the mental health, wellbeing and broader needs of students, including referral pathways and escalation protocols, and wider actions to address the risk factors for bullying and other harmful behaviours and to support a safe, respectful and inclusive culture, as discussed in Priority Area 5.

Teachers and school leaders must have adequate release time to manage complex behavioural issues, including time to implement and enforce any new anti-bullying policies or approaches. School staff need the time and opportunity to debrief incidents and undertake coordinated follow-up with students, parents, external support services and other staff – Independent Education Union of Australia Submission

Intensive targeted intervention to support those who engage in bullying behaviours or are bullied is very resource intensive and consume many hours of school leader time – Australian Education Union Submission

Stakeholders also noted the importance of broader reform processes to address the challenges faced by the school workforce. This includes the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan agreed by Education Ministers in December 2022, which sets out a pathway to addressing teacher workforce challenges.¹⁰⁰ The plan includes five priority areas: improving teacher supply; strengthening ITE; keeping the teachers we have; elevating the profession; and better understanding future teacher workforce needs.

Evidence indicates that

schools operate in an increasingly

complex landscape ... they are

expected to deliver a broader

range of outcomes for

an increasingly diverse cohort

of students.





School workforce safety and wellbeing

The Review heard of growing wellbeing and safety concerns for the school workforce and the need for appropriate support to uphold the rights of staff to a safe working environment and ensure their wellbeing.

These issues were reflected in a 2025 survey of over 8,000 Australian teachers, which found that up to 25% of participants felt unsafe at school, and that those who felt unsafe were less likely to be satisfied with their role and more likely to leave the profession.¹⁰¹ The safety concerns included student and parent behaviours and a need for greater support from schools and school systems.

The Review heard that the school workforce is increasingly experiencing bullying and other harmful behaviours from students and parents/carers. In particular, the Review heard that deepfakes, other online harms and the impacts of misogynistic online content are increasingly impacting teachers, and in particular female teachers. A recent survey of more than 1,000 Australian teachers found that almost 48% of female teachers reported being sexually harassed at school, and the majority of this harassment was from students.¹⁰² Additionally, 80% of respondents reported a recent increase in sexualised behaviours in schools, which may be attributed to early exposure to pornography, social media, the influence of social media influencers, and broader societal sexist attitudes.

The changing applications of technology are also changing the nature of online harassment. There have been numerous media reports of deep fake images being used for the character abuse of teachers and students across the country – Australian Education Union Submission

The Review heard that the school workforce is increasingly experiencing bullying and harmful behaviours from students and parents/carers.

Stakeholders emphasised that actions to address bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools must also include actions to uphold the safety and wellbeing of the school workforce. These efforts should align with broader existing commitments in this space and be supported by:

- ▶ strong school leadership to generate a culture in which bullying and other harmful behaviours towards school staff are prevented and addressed
- ▶ access to trauma-informed wellbeing supports for staff who are responding to or experiencing bullying and other forms of harm
- ▶ appropriate guidelines for parents/carers and broader school communities around expectations for respectful communications with school staff.

Everyone has the fundamental right to go to work in a safe and inclusive working environment, free from all forms of discrimination and harassment
– Australian Education Union Submission

When teachers' mental health is supported, there is a corresponding improvement in student engagement and learning environments
– Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW Submission



Relevant chapter recommendations

- ▶ Education Ministers commit to actions to empower and equip school communities to work together to prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours build safe and positive environments, including:
 - Trauma-informed training and resources for school leaders, teachers, teaching support staff, allied health and specialist staff on preventing and responding to bullying and harmful behaviours.
 - Targeted resources on addressing cyberbullying, deepfakes and online harms, developed in consultation with the eSafety Commissioner.
 - Resources to help and support students, upstanders (those supporting others at risk of being harmed) and families, including families of students who have experienced or engaged in bullying and other harmful behaviours. (*Recommendation 5a, b and c*)
- ▶ Education Ministers, school systems and school boards support local school action by providing:
 - Clear guidance on evidence-based, whole-of-school and trauma-informed responses that help schools intervene early and appropriately to prevent the development and/or escalation of harmful behaviours.
 - Structured initiatives that provide all students with appropriate support, experiences, teaching and resources to positively and confidently engage in learning.
 - Targeted and evidence-based approaches that help support and change behaviours of students engaging in bullying and other harmful behaviours, including supporting the schools to work with parents/carers to cultivate their child's prosocial behaviours. (*Recommendation 6b, c and d*)

Priority Area 5.

Reducing the bullying risks and fostering safe, inclusive and respectful communities

Bullying and other harmful behaviours can have strong impacts on student attendance, engagement, achievement and sense of belonging at school. Many factors can influence the likelihood of a student engaging in bullying or other harmful behaviours or the impact that these issues may have on a student. Some of these factors were highlighted in previous sections on whole-of-school culture and preventative action on bullying and other harmful behaviours, such as setting expectations and building students' social, emotional and relationship skills.

However, larger systemic efforts are also needed, including joint efforts of all parts of society – governments, school systems, schools, parents/carers, students, and the wider community – to reduce the risk of bullying and other harmful behaviours occurring and promote safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments and wider communities. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasised that bullying and other harmful behaviours are whole-of-community issues and as such can never be prevented and addressed by schools alone. The Review identified a need for targeted research into how societal issues intersect with bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools, to inform effective policy responses.

This aligns with the findings from the 2020 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation International Conference on School Bullying, which highlighted the need for 'whole of education' anti-bullying approaches that recognise the 'interconnectedness of the school with the wider community including education, technological and societal systems, values and pressures'.¹⁰³

Success in improving bullying prevention and response is reliant on bullying being recognised as a whole-societal issue rather than an issue that sits within schools alone – Queensland Catholic Education Commission Submission

Opportunities to enhance cohesive action to address bullying

Noting the diverse range of risk and protective factors for bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools, the Review identified opportunities for a more cohesive national policy approach to progressing action on these influencing factors. This would bring together action on student engagement, attendance, mental health and wellbeing, behaviour and safety to strengthen anti-bullying and broader interconnected outcomes.

This cohesive approach could be framed around 'wellbeing for learning and engagement' in line with the national priority areas of the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025–2034*, and together with the National Standard, would help improve the coordination and outcomes of relevant work nationally.¹⁰⁴

Some stakeholders suggested that a practical opportunity to embed this approach would be through reviewing the *Australian Student Wellbeing Framework*, the current national policy framework on student wellbeing, safety and relationships.¹⁰⁵ This would include reviewing and updating the framework to ensure it includes a holistic and up-to-date focus on bullying and other harmful behaviours, as well as their risk and protective factors.

Inclusion and belonging

The Review heard of a need for continued cross-portfolio action to help foster an inclusive society that is free from all forms of discrimination, noting that a sense of belonging is an important protective factor against bullying and other harmful behaviours.¹⁰⁶ This includes through ongoing commitments and activities to foster safe, inclusive and respectful Australian communities, and targeted actions to address



all forms of discrimination including racism, ableism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia.

Stakeholders suggested this may also help to reduce the disproportionate rates of bullying experienced by priority equity cohorts. As Children and Young People with Disability stated in their submission:

“Environments where children are routinely “othered” and their differences not acknowledged or celebrated allow bullying cultures to thrive – Children and Young People with Disability Australia Submission



Where possible, consideration should be given to existing commitments and efforts to promote inclusion and address inequality and discrimination, such as:

- ▶ *Australia's Disability Strategy*, which aims to ensure that people with disability can participate as equal members of society, and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, which clarify relevant obligations for education and training providers¹⁰⁷
- ▶ The *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, which aims to enable First Nations people and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by First Nations peoples¹⁰⁸
- ▶ The Australian Human Rights Commission's *National Anti-Racism Framework*, which provides a roadmap for governments, business and community organisations to address all forms of racism¹⁰⁹
- ▶ The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, which is Australia's overarching national policy framework to guide actions towards ending violence against women and children¹¹⁰
- ▶ *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*, which outlines the Australian Government's vision for gender equality¹¹¹
- ▶ Anti-discrimination and human rights legislation
- ▶ Other specific approaches across states and territories.

▶ *NATSIEC reiterates the need for antiracism frameworks to be considered as part of developing and implementing anti-bullying policies and programs – interpersonal racism would be a key example, and often an underpinning factor, of bullying and cannot be washed over – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation Submission*

Positive and safe learning environments

The Review heard of the important role that positive and safe learning environments play in preventing bullying and other harmful behaviours. This is supported by evidence, with various studies indicating that factors such as positive classroom learning climates and feeling safe at school are important protective factors against bullying and other harmful behaviours.¹¹²

As outlined through this report, evidence indicates that deepfakes and other online harms, including misogynistic online content, are having a growing impact on school learning environments. For example, in 2025 the eSafety Commissioner found that more than 1 in 2 children aged 10 to 17 years had been cyberbullied at some point (53%), with 38% experiencing cyberbullying in the past 12 months.¹¹³ Reports to the eSafety Commissioner about digitally altered intimate images, including deepfakes, from people under the age of 18 also more than doubled in the 18 months to June 2025, compared to the total number of reports received in the seven years prior.¹¹⁴

The Review heard that while these issues may occur outside the physical confines of a school, their consequences deeply permeate school learning environments. In addition, bullying and other harmful behaviours that commence at school can extend into harms occurring outside of school, further exacerbating the impacts on students.

Stakeholders called for action to address the risks and challenges posed by today's digital landscape. Ongoing research into the impacts of, and mitigation strategies for, deepfakes and other online harms, together with appropriate professional development as discussed in Priority Area 4, would enable a current understanding of emerging issues and effective responses. This focus on online risks would build on broader commitments to support positive and safe learning environments, such as the restrictions on the use of mobile phones and other personal devices in government schools, work underway on Australia's social media minimum age legislation, and the eSafety Commissioner's

agenda to improve community understanding around online harms.¹¹⁵

Continued efforts to ensure that Australian learning environments are positive and safe would build on broader commitments and policy in this area, including the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.¹¹⁶

Case example:

eSafety Toolkit for Schools

The Toolkit was developed in consultation with education sector representatives and is designed to support schools to create safer online environments. It provides four categories of resources: prepare, engage, educate and respond. The resources are backed by evidence and support a nationally consistent approach to preventing and responding to online safety issues. The Toolkit is flexible in its design so that schools can tailor how they use it, based on the needs of their community.¹¹⁷ Further information is at [Toolkit for Schools | eSafety Commissioner](#)

Bullying is not unique to schools – it reflects broader social and cultural norms. Discrimination, power imbalances, and exclusion based on race, gender, ability, sexuality, and socioeconomic status all contribute. The influence of digital technologies, online anonymity, and access to harmful online content significantly affect student behaviour and relationships (...) National responses must address these broader inequalities and include strategies that extend into families, communities, and digital environments – NSW Primary Principals Association Submission

Mental health and wellbeing

The Review heard that a continued focus on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people is critical, noting the close relationship between mental ill-health and bullying and other harmful behaviours highlighted through this report.¹¹⁸

Schools can play a critical role in supporting students' mental health and wellbeing and identifying and addressing needs for additional support, noting that school staff are often the first to observe changes in students' behaviour and emotional states.¹¹⁹ This is particularly true for certain groups of students, such as students in out-of-home care or experiencing other challenges outside of school, for whom school may provide a particularly important sense of stability, support and source of adult relationships.¹²⁰

Stakeholders emphasised the need for continued support for the school workforce to fulfil this role, including through appropriate access to wellbeing staff and evidence-based mental health and wellbeing programs and resources.

A range of initiatives are in place nationally to support the mental health and wellbeing of school students, such as Beyond Blue's Be You national mental health and wellbeing initiative.¹²¹ The National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy provides a framework to guide critical investment in the mental health and wellbeing of children and families. Specifically, the Strategy recommends investment that supports schools to deliver evidence-based programs that target their identified wellbeing needs, particularly bullying and racism.¹²² Appropriate support is also needed to support schools in the tragic event of a student suicide, such as the Suicide Postvention Toolkit¹²³ discussed in Priority Area 3.

Stakeholders also noted that issues such as 'violence, disruption and negative forces to wellbeing that occur outside of school also influence the actions and behaviours of bullies.'¹²⁴ Students who have experienced or witnessed violence in the home or experienced trauma, financial insecurity or other challenges are at higher risk of engaging in or experiencing

bullying or other harmful behaviours. This is particularly significant noting that the Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that over 30% of Australians experienced either physical abuse or emotional abuse in childhood, and almost 40% were exposed to domestic violence.¹²⁵

This highlights the importance of cross-sector partnerships to support students' mental health and wellbeing, including collaboration across the education, health, justice, community services, communication and other portfolios to help address the social drivers of wellbeing concerns and provide holistic support for students in need. This includes the benefits of leveraging broader assessment and referral processes across different sectors, particularly the health sector, to connect students to the appropriate supports.

 *Successful prevention also requires schools to work closely with other child-focused professionals. Strengthening multidisciplinary, school-based support (...) is a high priority – NSW Primary Principals Association Submission*

Continual improvement

In light of the rapidly evolving digital and broader schooling landscape, the Review also identified the need to prioritise continuous improvement, to ensure anti-bullying policies and implementation approaches remain suitably targeted to achieve change, adapt to emerging issues, and are being implemented and adhered to in schools. A continuous improvement focus would include the following elements:

- ▶ an ongoing research agenda on the drivers of bullying and other harmful behaviours, preventative approaches/interventions, prevalence, trends, impacts and related issues
- ▶ analysis of data to monitor national trends, risks and regular reviews of implementation of the National Standard and anti-bullying actions, and using this to inform ongoing refinement of policies and practices. Systems and school program level evaluations are also necessary, with actions taken in response to findings

- ▶ school systems and schools considering opportunities to collect meaningful data, to ensure informed decision-making that optimally targets investment on bullying and other harmful behaviours and their surrounding causes to best enable long-term benefits and culture change, including by considering the targeting of measures
- ▶ school systems and schools reviewing their anti-bullying policies and processes every two years to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are having the intended impact
- ▶ reviewing implementation of the recommendations from this report regularly to ensure that Australia's action remains suitably targeted to achieve change; is being implemented and adhered to in schools; and that the school workforce remains informed and supported to take appropriate action.

Consideration should also be given to opportunities to best target investment on measures that address bullying and other harmful behaviours or the risk and protective factors to support longer term implementation and benefits.



Relevant chapter recommendations

- ▶ The Australian Government lead transformative national actions, including:
 - A targeted public awareness campaign, to be developed with experts in primary prevention and behaviour change, the education sector, the school workforce, and other stakeholders, to:
 - build community understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours and their impacts, including cyberbullying and image-based abuse
 - equip the community to contribute to cultural change
 - support any national implementation of this Review's recommendations, including the National Standard. (*Recommendation 3a*)
- ▶ Education Ministers, school systems and school boards support local school action by providing:
 - Support for schools to analyse student-level data to enable the identification of bullying-related risks within their school communities to help inform targeted school-level prevention, early intervention and response and support activities, and to support continual improvement of approaches.
 - Structured initiatives that provide all students with appropriate support, experiences, teaching and resources to positively and confidently engage in learning. (*Recommendations 6a and c*)
- ▶ Education Ministers commit to continual improvement in addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours, including:
 - Reviewing implementation of these recommendations in 2027 and routinely thereafter to ensure Australia's action remains suitably targeted to achieve change and is being implemented and adhered to in schools and the school workforce remains informed and supported to take appropriate action.
 - Identifying opportunities to build the national evidence base through research and data collection on risk factors, trends and impacts of actions to adapt to emerging issues. (*Recommendation 7*)
- ▶ Education Ministers note that preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours goes beyond the education setting and engage with other relevant portfolio Ministers to support a whole-of-society approach including to address broader risk factors and support safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments, including through linkages with the health, community and communication sectors. (*Recommendation 8*)

The National Standard

Beyond being places of learning, schools are universal touchpoints that can play a critical role in preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours. The school sector has been working on anti-bullying actions and there are many great examples of good practice and supporting measures on the ground. However, this has not been implemented consistently across Australia, and the context for the Review indicates that key issues persist, despite best efforts and work to date.

Feedback from consultations flagged a resounding opportunity and a growing need for a principles-based National Standard to further equip all schools with equitable, evidence-based and mature anti-bullying infrastructures and approaches to enable collaborative action. The Review found that for such a standard to be relevant, credible and valuable to the communities using it, it must be complemented by enabling actions and allow for flexible adaptation to the diverse requirements of school communities.

A suggested National Standard for bullying in schools is outlined below.



Need for consistency and national systemic change

The Review consistently heard strong support for a system that resets national expectations through a National Standard so that every Australian school is a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment, where bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted and will be actively addressed. While schools implement policies on the ground, a national approach where all players work towards common goals can amplify the impact.

The Review has highlighted the need for improvements to take us from where we are now to a system that:

- ▶ supports widespread, shared and contemporary understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours, their causes and their impacts
- ▶ provides clarity and certainty on expectations and actions that will be taken on bullying and other harmful behaviours
- ▶ empowers and equips school leaders, teachers and the school community to act
- ▶ includes evidence-based, locally tailored prevention and response actions on bullying and other harmful behaviours that involve students, families and the school workforce in decisions about anti-bullying efforts
- ▶ takes action to address broader surrounding factors that can influence bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Students, families and educators have reported that available information and resources can be difficult to understand or access. The Review also heard that anti-bullying action in schools can be highly variable, poorly implemented or not visible, which creates risks around whether bullying and other harmful behaviours will be appropriately managed, as well as uncertainty for young people, families and the school workforce. Too often anti-bullying action in schools also remains anchored in reactive models, intervening only after harm has occurred and focusing on managing incidents rather than preventing them.

The Review heard that Australia's schooling environment is increasingly complex, including as a result of the evolving digital landscape, and that bullying and other harmful behaviours are growing issues to be managed alongside other pressures such as classroom disruption, mental health and wellbeing, inequality and discrimination, and increasing societal influences. The modern schooling context requires holistic consideration of how to effectively prevent and respond to bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Nationally consistent principles towards addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools can provide the important framing to set anti-bullying expectations and inform actions across Australia. In response to the evidence and stakeholder engagement, the Review has concluded there is a need for a National Standard to:

- ▶ be adopted by school systems (state and territory government and non-government education authorities) and primary and secondary schools, with overarching objectives of:
 - upholding students' right to education and providing a safe learning environment
 - informing and building on the anti-bullying policies and practices across every school in Australia
 - being contemporary and tailored to the needs of students and schools in today's education system
- ▶ comprise complementary elements that together enable a clear direction, consistent expectations and an achievable approach to action
- ▶ acknowledge that to effectively address bullying and other harmful behaviours, holistic action on surrounding influencing factors must also be taken.

A National Standard would not replace or be counter to anti-bullying efforts already in place; rather it would strengthen commitments nationally and inform effective approaches to ensure that collectively Australia is taking the best possible stance against bullying and other harmful behaviours and ending the harmful effects they are having on our young people and their futures.

Flexibility to local contexts and needs

The Review repeatedly heard that while further consistency on expectations and evidence-based approaches is required, a National Standard must provide schools with flexibility to respond to bullying and other harmful behaviours in ways that reflect their unique contexts and student needs. This recognises the diversity of Australian schools and acknowledges that school leaders, staff and communities are best placed to design and implement locally responsive anti-bullying strategies.

This includes tailored responses to reflect the unique experiences and needs of diverse student groups, such as First Nations students, students with disability and LGBTIQ+ students, as discussed in Priority Area 1.

 ***It is essential that a National Standard is adaptable to a variety of school contexts, enabling schools to effectively address the unique needs of their communities (...). A consistent National Standard for responding to bullying should emphasise flexibility, allowing schools to adapt it to their unique contexts, allowing schools the autonomy to address the needs of their communities effectively – Independent Schools Australia Submission***

While the suggested National Standard would set consistent expectations and requirements to be adhered to, it would provide school systems and schools with flexibility to address bullying and other harmful behaviours in a way that is appropriate for their local context.

Shared intention

The Review heard there is a lack of common understanding or agreement on what bullying is and is not, particularly in a changing schooling and online environment. Research shows that having a shared understanding of bullying across schools, systems and communities is key to taking effective anti-bullying action.

The following definition of bullying for use in Australian schools was agreed by Education Ministers in 2011 and updated in 2018, and has been promoted through national initiatives like *Bullying. No Way.*¹²⁶

“Bullying is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening. Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert). Bullying behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (for example, through sharing of digital records). Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders. Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.”

The adoption of the 2018 definition was an important milestone and has informed school policies and resources. However, the definition is not currently used universally. For example, some jurisdictions have adjusted the wording or added additional detail to the definition they use.

This inconsistent understanding of what behaviours are classified as bullying has caused a variety of concerns, including inconsistencies in what behaviours are considered bullying and therefore acted on by schools, and creating limitations for sharing of resources.

 *Bullying is deeply harmful, however often overlooked or mischaracterised, especially within Australian school culture. While there's a general understanding that bullying is wrong, it's frequently masked as "banter", making it difficult for students to speak up without being labelled as overly sensitive or unable to take a joke*
– Youth Steering Committee Submission

The current definition of bullying has also raised concerns in respect of references to bullying involving a misuse of power, an intention to cause harm, and repetition. The Review heard of the need to further consider these criteria, as those who bully may not realise the potential effect of their actions; power imbalances may not always be evident (such as when a student bullies a teacher); and a single instance of behaviour can cause significant harm.

Likewise, new challenges and insights are constantly emerging that can impact an operational definition of bullying, including the evolving online context and growing technology-enabled abuse. Bullying and other harmful behaviours, including cyberbullying, can also intersect with anti-discrimination, online safety, workplace safety and criminal laws. The Review heard that any updates to a national definition of bullying should bring consistency across these factors, including to support clarity on where policing, the eSafety Commissioner or other touch-points may be required in conjunction with school-based approaches.

The environment in which a definition of bullying operates has changed and is likely to continue to evolve. However, the Review heard prominently of the need for a shared understanding and intent to support consistent expectations around action.

The Review heard that a shared understanding and intent to act on bullying and harmful behaviour gives everyone the same starting point to prevent and address harmful behaviours, improves communication across school communities, and provides a common reference point to set national expectations.

The Review heard that considering bullying within a broader continuum of harmful behaviour embeds a shared understanding and clear expectations that all harmful behaviour warrants a response. Focusing foremost on whether harm was caused will help ensure all harmful actions are addressed and all impacted students supported, keeping the emphasis on maintaining a safe learning environment for all children and young people. Whether actions are defined as bullying, harassment, conflict or something else, this approach reinforces the importance of considering individual experiences, moves away from intentionality and encourages prevention, early and proactive intervention and minimising escalation of harms. This focus is reflected in the National Standard and recommendations of the report.

The Review also heard that surrounding education and awareness-raising efforts would be beneficial in increasing understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours and their impacts with a view to promoting whole-of-community action. This could include the development and delivery of a national primary prevention and behaviour change focused campaign to reduce the risk of bullying and other harmful behaviours occurring, similar to related national campaigns such as Stop it at the Start.¹²⁷

The Review heard there is a lack of common understanding or agreement on what bullying is, and is not, particularly in a changing schooling and online environment.

Suggested National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools

A National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools

A National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools provides the framework for all school systems and schools to establish shared national expectations and actions and provide confidence that no matter where a student goes to school, bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (referred to as bullying and other harmful behaviours) will be appropriately addressed and the school workforce supported to take appropriate action.

The National Standard considers bullying to be within a continuum of harmful behaviours and negative interpersonal behaviours, whether physical or psychosocial, that are counter to creating a safe learning environment.

The National Standard comprises interconnected principles-based elements, set out below, which should be implemented together to effectively prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Standard 1:

Consistent anti-bullying requirements

School systems implement explicit and dedicated action to build positive and respectful school community cultures, to ensure bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted, appropriate and timely action is taken, and students' right to education and a safe learning environment is upheld.

This involves implementing and adhering to all the interconnected elements of the National Standard in a way that is appropriate for the unique local school context.

Standard 2:

Whole-of-school and locally tailored approaches

Schools implement a whole-of-school approach to preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours, involving the whole school community – students, parents and carers, the school workforce and wider school community – working together against bullying and other harmful behaviours, upholding shared expectations and creating a positive and safe learning environment. This includes:

- ▶ Developing and implementing school-based anti-bullying policies and processes in partnership with students, parents and carers, and the school workforce, for their local school context.
- ▶ Ensuring the school community has access to information and opportunities to support and contribute to anti-bullying actions.
- ▶ School leadership driving and embedding anti-bullying and behavioural expectations throughout school operations and culture.
- ▶ Considering and addressing the unique needs of the local school context, including the unique and intersecting needs of diverse student groups and school staff including First Nations people, those who identify as LGBTIQ+, people with disability, and other groups experiencing additional risk factors such as women and girls.
- ▶ School systems assisting schools to deliver this through appropriate leadership and supports.

Standard 3:

Create clarity and confidence in school anti-bullying action

All school systems and schools have visible and transparent anti-bullying policies and processes in place and are accountable for timely and appropriate actions. This includes:

- ▶ Anti-bullying policies and processes being publicly available and accessible and clearly specifying processes on how to report an incident; how schools will manage and communicate their actions; what supports are available; and what escalation steps can be taken.
- ▶ All school systems and schools make reasonable effort to initiate a response to any observed or reported harmful behaviour, including bullying, within two school days of becoming aware of the behaviour. Initial responses involve early safety and support planning and action to prevent further harm and initial communication actions, recognising further time may be required to fully address the issue.
- ▶ School systems and schools communicating what actions have been taken, and the reasons for those actions, to those involved or impacted, to the greatest extent possible while maintaining privacy responsibilities.
- ▶ Schools keeping records outlining steps taken against the school's anti-bullying policy and procedures.
- ▶ School systems and schools reviewing their anti-bullying policies and processes in 2027 and routinely thereafter to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are having the intended impact.

Standard 4:

Intervening early and appropriately

All school systems and schools implement an evidence-based continuum of prevention, early proactive intervention and response action on bullying and other harmful behaviours. This includes:

- ▶ Prioritising primary prevention and proactive early intervention action to stop bullying and other harmful behaviours from occurring and escalating.
- ▶ Ensuring response actions are trauma-informed, relationship-focused, justifiable and tailored to the unique circumstances involved.
- ▶ Ensuring all those involved in, or affected by, an incident are supported, including ensuring wellbeing supports are available for students and staff.



- ▶ Supporting students to understand the cause and impacts of their behaviour with a view to ending the cycle of bullying and other harmful behaviours.
- ▶ Providing clear and fair escalation pathways where interventions have not effectively resolved an incident.
- ▶ School systems ensuring their schools have access to information and guidance to support implementation of evidence-based and trauma-informed prevention, early intervention and response action.

Standard 5:

Support the school workforce

School systems and schools ensure school leaders, educators and non-teaching staff are empowered and equipped to effectively prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours and to support a positive and safe learning and working environment. This includes:

- ▶ Providing trauma-informed professional development on bullying and other harmful behaviours, risk and protective factors, and appropriate prevention and response action.

- ▶ Ensuring the school workforce is given the time needed to undertake professional development and contribute to bullying and other harmful behaviour prevention and response activities.
- ▶ Ensuring the school workforce understands the school's policies and processes to follow and has access to resources and guidance to help them be accountable and take appropriate action.
- ▶ Providing support for staff impacted by or responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Standard 6:

Reducing risks and fostering safe,

inclusive and respectful communities

School systems and schools take action to:

- ▶ Address the broader risk and protective factors influencing bullying and other harmful behaviours, including through:
 - age, diversity, culturally and developmentally appropriate education on respectful relationships, social and emotional skills, digital safety and citizenship
 - explicit teaching on bullying and other harmful behaviours
- ▶ Ensure continual improvement, including through data collection and analysis, evaluation and research to ensure Australia's anti-bullying actions remain suitably targeted to achieve change and adapt to emerging issues.



Relevant chapter recommendations

- ▶ Education Ministers commit to actions and reforms that set a National Standard for every Australian school to be a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment where:

- bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (referred to as bullying and other harmful behaviours), as described in this report, are not accepted, and
- the school workforce – including principals, school leaders, teachers, education support staff, specialist support staff and health professionals – is supported to take appropriate action. (*Recommendation 1*)

- ▶ Education Ministers consider the suggested principles-based National Standard included in the report for implementation across all school systems. (*Recommendation 2*)

- ▶ The Australian Government lead transformative national actions, including:

- A targeted public awareness campaign, to be developed with experts in primary prevention and behaviour change, the education sector, the school workforce, and other stakeholders, to:
 - build community understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours and their impacts, including cyberbullying and image-based abuse
 - equip the community to contribute to cultural change
 - support any national implementation of this Review's recommendations, including the National Standard. (*Recommendation 3a*)

- ▶ Education Ministers commit to continual improvement in addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours, including:
 - Reviewing implementation of these recommendations in 2027 and routinely thereafter to ensure Australia's action remains suitably targeted to achieve change and is being implemented and adhered to in schools and the school workforce remains informed and supported to take appropriate action. (*Recommendation 7a*)



Appendices

Appendix A – Terms of Reference

Context

Bullying and cyber bullying have significant detrimental impacts on student mental health and wellbeing. Bullying undermines student wellbeing, attendance, engagement and learning outcomes. It also contributes to lifelong impacts such as reduced community participation, poor social-economic outcomes, and increases in ill-mental and physical health.

Bullying is not something that happens just in schools, but schools are places where we can identify instances of bullying, intervene, and provide support to children and young people. 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.

Currently, there are a wide range of programs, practices, resources, tools, and supports available for students, families and educators aimed at reducing or preventing bullying that have been developed by governments, mental health experts, peak bodies, academics and commercial providers.

The Australian Government has funded a range of measures to support student mental health and wellbeing and address bullying, including (but not limited to):

- ▶ \$307 million for the National Student Wellbeing Program
- ▶ \$10.8 million for the voluntary mental health tool My Mind Check
- ▶ \$4.2 million in funding for the Australian Schools Anti-Bullying Collective.

The Australian Government also funds the Student Wellbeing Hub, which provides a range of resources on student wellbeing for teachers, students and parents.

In addition, significant work is taking place across schools in all jurisdictions.

Despite this work, students, families and educators frequently report that the available information and resources are overwhelming, inconsistent, and difficult to understand and access; with national data showing that reports of bullying are rising.

To address this issue, the Australian Government will lead the development of an approach to a consistent National Standard to address bullying in schools (both prevention and response), informed by a rapid, expert-led review supported by a reference group to advise on education system and policy issues.

Purpose of this review

The review will look at what is working and what needs strengthening, before reporting to Education Ministers with options for the development of an approach to a consistent National Standard for responding to bullying and its underlying causes in schools. If agreed, 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.

This work aligns with Commonwealth legislation that has been introduced to set a minimum age for accessing social media as part of a broader harm minimisation approach to the regulation of online platforms.

Conduct of the review

This review will be funded by the Australian Government, which will appoint independent experts as review leaders, supported by a reference group to advise on education system and policy issues. The Australian Government will also provide secretariat support for the review.

States and territories and the non-government school sectors will facilitate consultation with key stakeholders, including those in schools. This may include gathering and providing relevant information and providing logistical support for the review.

The Review will begin in early 2025 following the appointment of the independent reviewers. It will include in-person engagement, significant online engagement and a written feedback process. In person and online engagement will include engagement across parent groups, school peaks, unions, and government agencies, as well as directly with parents, teachers and young people to ensure their lived experience is considered in the Review.

The Review will report directly to the Australian Government Minister for Education. The report will then be shared with all Australian Education Ministers.

The Australian Government will ensure the states and territories and the non-government sector are regularly updated on the review through the Australian Education Senior Officials Committee.

Scope

The Review will provide Education Ministers with:

1. An overview of relevant research and evidence on best practice in relation to preventing and responding to bullying in school contexts – including addressing bullying behaviours and reducing underlying causes.
2. A stocktake of interventions that address bullying that are in place in Australian schools.
3. A desktop review of the effectiveness of different types of interventions to address bullying behaviours and support individuals who have been bullied.
4. Details of possible models for a consistent National Standard for responding to bullying and its underlying causes in school contexts.
5. Advice on what a consistent National Standard to address bullying should comprise, which may include principles for proactive procedures, data collection, communication, feedback processes and intervention mechanisms and escalation pathways, and other features such as considerations for responding to bullying of specific cohorts such as students with disability.
6. Advice on how the success or otherwise of a consistent National Standard could be determined.

Consultation

The Review will include in-person engagement, significant online engagement and a written feedback process. In person and online engagement will include engagement across parent groups, school peaks, unions, and government agencies, as well as directly with parents, teachers and young people.

Appendix B – List of acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym	Full term
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AERO	Australian Education Research Organisation
AI	Artificial intelligence
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leaders
BFSA	Better and Fairer School Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025–2034
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
MTSS	Multi-tiered system of supports
NATSIEC	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation
NATSIPA	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBL	Positive Behaviour for Learning
The Review	Anti-Bullying Rapid Review
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Appendix C – Glossary of key terms

Term	Definition
Anti-bullying infrastructure	Anti-bullying infrastructure refers to the suite of systems, policies, resources, and practices that a school and/or school system has in place to prevent, address, and respond to bullying behaviour.
Bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (bullying and other harmful behaviours)	The report acknowledges the definition of bullying endorsed by Education Ministers in 2011 and revised in 2018, but also outlines possible limitations to the definition, as heard by the Review. This report understands bullying within a spectrum of harmful behaviours.^a The report defines harmful behaviours as a range of negative interpersonal behaviours, whether physical or psychosocial, that may threaten a young person's right to a safe learning environment or the rights of the school workforce to a safe work environment. This includes bullying, cyberbullying and other online harms violence and aggression, harassment (including sexual and gender-based harassment, homophobia, transphobia, racism, ableism, misogyny and ageism), discrimination, emotional abuse, conflict, or poor relationships and interactions. Within the spectrum of harmful behaviours, the report uses 'bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (bullying and other harmful behaviours)' as a collective for all forms of bullying, cyberbullying and other online harms, antecedent and other harmful behaviours, including verbal, social, physical, overt, covert, direct and indirect behaviours. Instances of bullying and other harmful behaviours can extend into criminal offences and behaviour. Context for definition Understanding bullying within this continuum of harmful behaviours embeds a shared understanding and clear expectations that all harmful behaviours warrant appropriate and reasonable action. Focusing foremost on whether harm was caused prioritises the individual experience and embeds a bias towards remedial action, regardless of intent or subjective understanding of bullying. This ensures emphasis remains on maintaining a safe learning environment for all young people.
Continuums of prevention and intervention	A continuum of prevention and/or intervention refers to the range of strategies required over time to prevent bullying and harm from occurring, or reoccurring. The continuum encompasses prevention, early intervention, help-seeking/reporting pathways, response, recovery and escalation.
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)	This term refers to Australians who were born overseas, have a parent born overseas or speak a variety of languages. ^b

a Bullying No Way, [Types of bullying, Australian Education Authorities & The State of Queensland](#), 2024, accessed September 2025.

b Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Culturally and linguistically diverse populations](#), AIHW, 2018, accessed September 2025.

Term	Definition
Culturally safe and/or appropriate	Schools and educators that are culturally safe and appropriate understand students' cultural context and respond appropriately for the benefit of each student. For the purposes of this report, cultural safety is about ensuring learning environments are safe for people, including where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It involves shared respect, meaning, knowledge and experience, as well as learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.^c Cultural safety is met through actions from the majority position which recognise, respect and nurture the unique cultural identity.^d Essential features of cultural safety include an understanding of one's culture; an acknowledgment of difference, and a requirement that schools are actively mindful and respectful of this difference; and the ability to recognise, address and prevent racism. Only the person who is the recipient of a service or interaction can determine whether it is culturally safe.^e Respectful and culturally appropriate interventions are based on cultural awareness and sensitivity, which begins with learning about other cultures and cultural beliefs.^f Acting in a way that is culturally appropriate means acting in a way that is respectful of and suitable to another person's or group's cultural values, beliefs, practices and identity, ensuring that your actions do not cause harm or offence, or perpetuate stereotypes.
Cyberbullying (and online harm)	Cyberbullying, also referred to as online bullying, is a subset of verbal and/or social bullying that is carried out through technology. It involves a person using the internet to be mean to another person so they feel bad or upset.^g For example, using a mobile phone or a camera to hurt or embarrass someone.^h Cyberbullying can occur via social media, games, apps, or any other online or electronic service or platform. It can include posts, comments, texts, messages, chats, livestreams, memes, images, videos and emails. Online harms can include any other kinds of online content or behaviours that create harm, such as misogynistic, violent or other harmful content or behaviours.

c Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), '[RACGP – Criterion C2.1 – Respectful and culturally appropriate care](#)', RACGP, accessed September 2025.

d Closing the Gap, [12. Definitions | Closing the Gap](#), Closing the Gap, accessed September 2025.

e Closing the Gap, [12. Definitions | Closing the Gap](#), Closing the Gap, accessed September 2025.

f Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), '[RACGP – Criterion C2.1 – Respectful and culturally appropriate care](#)', RACGP, accessed September 2025.

g eSafety Commissioner, *Bullying online*, [Bullying online | eSafety Commissioner](#), eSafety Commissioner, 2025, accessed September 2025.

h Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), '[Cyberbullying](#)', AHRC, 2011, accessed September 2025.

Term	Definition
Deepfake	A deepfake is a digital photo, video or sound file of a real person that has been edited using artificial intelligence software to create an extremely realistic but false depiction of them doing or saying something that they did not actually do or say.ⁱ In the context of cyberbullying, deepfakes have been used as a tool for identity theft, extortion, sexual exploitation, reputational damage, ridicule, intimidation and harassment.
Digital safety and citizenship	Digital safety and citizenship refers to the knowledge and skills needed to use digital technologies such as the internet in a positive way. Digital safety and digital citizenship are distinct but closely related concepts, with digital safety focusing on concrete measures for personal protection online, while digital citizenship encompasses the broader ethical and responsible behaviour of an individual within digital communities.
Education Ministers	Education Ministers are the Australian, state and territory government ministers responsible for the education portfolio in their jurisdiction. Education Ministers meet regularly each year and work collaboratively across early childhood education and care, school education, higher education and international education.^j
Educator	An educator is a professional in the field of education. This includes teachers, school leaders, teachers' aides, assistant teachers and First Nations educators.^k
Escalation pathways	Escalation pathways are clear protocols and tiered models for continuing to address situations such as bullying and harmful behaviours with graduated responses, aligned with inclusive and trauma-informed practices.
First Nations	Australia is made up of many different and distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, each with their own culture, language, beliefs and practices.^l The term 'First Nations' is used in this report to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Initial teacher education (ITE)	Initial teacher education is tertiary-level education that prepares pre-service teachers to teach in Australian schools.^m

i eSafety Commissioner, '[Deepfake trends and challenges – position statement](#)', eSafety Commissioner, 2022, accessed September 2025.

j Australian Government Department of Education, '[Education Ministers Meeting Terms of Reference](#)', Department of Education, 2021, accessed September 2025.

k Independent Expert Panel, '[Improving outcomes for all: The report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to inform a better and fairer education system](#)', Department of Education, Australian Government, 2023, accessed September 2025.

l Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), '[Australia's First Peoples](#)', AIATSIS, 2022, accessed September 2025.

m Department of Education, '[Through growth to achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools](#)', Department of Education, Australian Government, 2018, accessed September 2025.

Term	Definition
Intersectional	Intersectionality refers to the way that different aspects of a person's identity intersect with and impact one another, and how the combined experience of multiple forms of discrimination is often greater than the sum of those discriminations alone. ⁿ
LGBTIQA+	LGBTIQA+ is an acronym representing diverse people in terms of their sexualities, genders, and/or sex characteristics, encompassing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, queer, questioning, and asexual individuals, along with others.
Multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS)	MTSS is a coordinated system of supports for students across a sliding scale of increasingly intensive tiers. The foundation is high-quality instruction across tiered levels. Subsequent tiers offer more intensive high-quality evidence-based instruction to students needing additional academic, social-emotional, or behavioural support.
Neurodivergent	A person or people whose neurodevelopment falls outside of (or diverges from) the range usually considered 'typical'. ^o
Non-teaching staff	Non-teaching staff refers to all school employees who are not directly responsible for leading classroom instruction but support the overall educational environment. This term may include, but is not limited to, administrative staff, learning support officers, technical and maintenance staff, counsellors, nurses, and operational roles like cleaners and cafeteria staff.
Out-of-home care	Out-of-home care is residential care and control of a child or young person that is provided by a person other than a parent of the child or young person and at a place other than the usual home of the child or young person, whether or not for fee, gain or reward. ^p
Principles-based	The report refers to a principles-based National Standard to indicate that, instead of providing detailed, prescriptive rules, the Standard uses high-level expectations to guide actions and decisions while recognising different school contexts.
Priority equity cohort	Priority equity cohorts are defined in the current National School Reform Agreement to include First Nations students, students living in regional, rural and remote locations, students with a disability and students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. ^q

n Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), '[Racism. It stops with me: Key terms](#)', AHRC, 2022, accessed September 2025.

o Department of Social Services, '[National Autism Strategy 2025–2031](#)', Australian Government, 2025, accessed September 2025.

p Department of Social Services (DSS), '[What is out-of-home care?](#)' | [Department of Social Services](#), DSS, 2011, accessed September 2025.

q Coalition of Australian Governments, '[National School Reform Agreement](#)', Department of Education and Training & Coalition of Australian Governments, 2021, accessed September 2025.

Term	Definition
Professional development	Professional development refers to broad variety of facilitated learning opportunities, specialised training, and professional learning intended to support teachers to improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill and effectiveness in the classroom with the goal of improving children's developmental or educational outcomes. ^r
Protective factors	Characteristics that protect against adverse experiences. In a bullying context, protective factors are characteristics of a person, place or situation that reduce the likelihood of a negative outcome.
Regional, rural, remote	The Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure defines five classes of relative geographic remoteness across Australia: Major Cities of Australia, Inner Regional Australia, Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia. These categories are characterised by a measure of relative geographic access to services. ^s
Relationship-centred/focused	The terms relationship-centred and relationship-focused refer to the fact that 'bullying is a relationship problem'. Human relationships must be at the core of anti-bullying approaches, with a focus on social skills like cooperation, managing conflict, making friends, coping and being resilient, recognising and managing feelings and being empathetic. For the purposes of the report, references to relationship-based practice or a relational approach describe methods that promote informed, attuned, and healthy human connections.
Respectful Relationships Education (RRE)	Different jurisdictions and sectors have in place different definitions for RRE. This document applies the definition established by Our Watch – Australia's national leader in the primary prevention of gender-based violence – which states that RRE is the holistic approach to school-based, primary prevention of gender-based violence. It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence. ^t
Restorative practices	In this approach to behaviour management, the term 'restorative' is used to stress that when a student does not meet the standards of behaviour set by the school community, restoring relationships, repairing harm and learning perspective-taking and social responsibility is more important and effective than simply delivering punishment. Restorative practices can include practices such as circle time, restorative interviews, or restorative conferences.

r Romijn, B., Slot, P. and Leseman P., '[Increasing teachers' intercultural competences in teacher preparation programs and through professional development: A review](#)', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 98, accessed 8 September 2025.

s Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), '[Remoteness areas](#)', ABS, 2023, accessed September 2025.

t Our Watch, '[Respectful relationships education](#)', Our Watch, 2025, accessed September 2025.

Term	Definition
Risk factors	Characteristics that increase the chances of adverse experiences. In a bullying context, risk factors are characteristics of a person, place or situation that increase the likelihood of bullying or harmful behaviours occurring.
School boards	School boards are generally governing bodies elected to represent a specific geographic school community and are responsible for the management and governance of the local school district. For the purposes of this report, school boards refer to the governing bodies of both government and non-government schools, including boards, councils or equivalent authorities. These bodies are responsible for overseeing the school's day-to-day operations and educational programs, applying the school's strategic direction and ethos, and ensuring that schools maintain high standards while operating in accordance with legal and government policy requirements.
School community	The school community is considered to comprise students, school staff (for example, teachers, school leaders and other professionals, administrators, other support staff and volunteers), parents/carers and others with an interest in the school.
School leader	School leaders include principals, deputy and assistant principals, and head, executive and senior teachers, among others.
School systems	This report uses school systems to refer to the entire framework of institutions, policies and organisations responsible for delivering education within Australia.
Social and emotional learning education	Social and emotional learning is about developing the ability to care for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships and handle challenging situations. ^u
Social cohesion	The capacity to create social cohesion is, in the context of this report, the capacity of schools and communities to foster a sense of belonging, mutual respect and shared responsibility among students and staff, regardless of gender, culture, religion, and linguistic or socio-economic backgrounds.
Socio-economic status (SES)	Socio-economic status refers the social and economic position of an individual or group of individuals, including in relation to income, wealth, education and employment, in the wider community. An individual is considered to have low SES if they are in the bottom quartile according to the ABS Index of Education and Occupation .
Stakeholders	Stakeholder is a general, context-dependent term referring to persons, groups or organisations with an interest in the topic. For the purposes of this report, stakeholders can refer to young people; parents and carers; principals, teachers and school staff; school peak bodies; community and representative bodies; unions and government agencies.

^u Be You, 'Social and emotional learning – Be You', Beyond Blue, 2025, accessed September 2025.

Term	Definition
Standard	For the purposes of this Review, the suggested National Standard is a principles-based, established document that sets consistent expectations and requirements to be adhered to, while still providing school systems and schools with flexibility to address bullying in a way that is appropriate for their unique local contexts. This recognises the diverse characteristics of Australian schools and student populations, and that school systems, schools and their communities are best placed to understand local needs and circumstances.
Student attendance	For the purposes of this report, student attendance refers to a student's presence and participation in scheduled educational activities, such as classes, school trips, and other school-provided learning events.
Student engagement	This report defines student engagement as the extent to which a student identifies with and is actively involved in the academic and non-academic aspects of their school. Engagement encompasses a broad range of factors including behavioural components such as attendance and participation, emotional elements such as feelings of connectedness or belonging with their school community, social components including relationships with teachers and peers, and cognitive factors such as motivation, academic attainment and performance.
Student with disability	This report uses the definition of disability as outlined in section 4 of the <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i> (DDA).^v The DDA reflects a social model of disability discrimination but uses medically based definitions of disability. Disability can be a result of the interaction between physical barriers and impairments as well as social, attitudinal and environmental barriers. Section 4 of the DDA defines disability (in relation to a person) as: • total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or • total or partial loss of a part of the body; or • the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or • the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or • the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or • a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or • a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or that results in disturbed behaviour. It includes disability that: • presently exists; or • previously existed but no longer exists; or • may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or • is imputed to a person.

^v Federal Register of Legislation, '[Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)', Australian Government, section 4, accessed September 2025.

Term	Definition
Tailoring to local contexts	Tailoring to local contexts refers to the practice of adjusting practices and policies according to the unique characteristics and community of a school. What works for one school might not work for another, and there are infinite ways one school might be different from the next.
Trauma-informed practice	Trauma-informed practice is an approach where education systems, schools and school staff understand, recognise and respond effectively to the impact of trauma on students. ^w
Upstanders	An upstander is someone who actively chooses to support a person being abused or harmed – whether online or in person, privately or publicly – by taking action to help them. In the context of the report, an upstander can extend beyond reaction to a single incident and refer to someone who acts positively and safely as a defender against bullying and harmful behaviours, including by upholding values of kindness and empathy in their day to day.
Whole-of-school approach	A whole-of-school approach integrates classroom education with broader efforts to shape school culture, policies, and practices. It involves leadership, professional learning, teaching, family and community engagement, and support for staff and students, ensuring the entire school community is actively involved.

^w Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, [‘Trauma-informed practice in schools: an explainer’](#), Department of Education, New South Wales Government, 2023, accessed September 2025.

Appendix D – Consultations

During the Review, consultations with key stakeholders took place both online and in person at national, state, and territory levels. Stakeholder groups were selected using existing departmental lists and in collaboration with government and non-government education authorities in each jurisdiction.

The co-chairs engaged in the following meetings from February 2025 to mid-August 2025:

- ▶ In total there were 115 meetings:
 - 38 in person
 - 72 virtual
 - 5 hybrid.
- ▶ Approximately 610 attendees attended these meetings.
 - This represents the sum of participants from each meeting (439) and an approximation of participants from school visits (171).

The above numbers do not include the co-chairs' attendance to at a meeting of the South Australian Governing Council and School Board hybrid, meeting which included approximately 150 people.

The co-chairs met with the following stakeholders over the duration of the Review.

State and territory Education Ministers

Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood (ACT)

The Hon Courtney Houssos MLC, A/g Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Early Learning (NSW)

The Hon Jo Hersey MLA, Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Early Education (NT)

The Hon John-Paul Langbroek MP, Minister for Education and the Arts (QLD)

The Hon Blair Boyer MP, Minister for Education, Training and Skills (SA)

The Hon Jo Palmer MLC, Minister for Education (TAS)

The Hon Ben Carroll MP, Deputy Premier and Minister for Education (VIC)

The Hon Sabine Winton MLA, Minister for Education; Early Childhood (WA)

Education departments

ACT Education and Training

NSW Department of Education

Northern Territory Department of Education

Queensland Department of Education

South Australian Department for Education

Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People

Victorian Department of Education

Western Australian Department of Education

Non-government education stakeholders

Independent Schools Australia (ISA)

Association of Independent Schools of the ACT

Association of Independent Schools of NSW

Independent Schools Northern Territory

Independent Schools Queensland

Association of Independent Schools South Australia

Independent Schools Tasmania

Independent Schools Victoria

Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia

National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC)

Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn

Catholic Education Northern Territory

Queensland Catholic Education Commission

Catholic Education Services Diocese of Cairns

Catholic Education Tasmania

Victorian Catholic Education Authority

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools

Catholic Education Western Australia

Government departments, offices and agencies

Australian Government – Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Australian Government – Office for Youth

State and territory government bodies

Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet

LGBTIQA+ Ministerial Advisory Council – ACT

Community Services Directorate – ACT

Office for Women – ACT

Child Death and Serious Injury Review Committee – SA

Shona Reid, Guardian for Children and Young People – SA

Child Development Council – SA

NSW Education Standards Authority

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

School Curriculum and Standards Authority WA

Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Commissioners

eSafety Commissioner

Regional Education Commissioner

National Children's Commissioner

State and territory

Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner – Tas

Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People – SA

The list below provides the names of representative organisations and does not include individuals. As well as peak bodies a number of families, parents and carers have met with the co-chairs to provide information on lived experience.

Peak bodies

Parent peak bodies – national

Australian Parents Council

Australian Council of State School Organisations

Isolated Children's Parents' Association

Catholic School Parents Australia

Parent peak bodies – state and territory

ACT Parents

Catholic School Parents Queensland

Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales

Isolated Children's Parents' Association, Queensland

Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations

P&Cs Queensland

Parents Victoria

Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network

South Australian Association of School Parents Communities

Tasmanian Association of State School Organisation

Western Australian Council of State School Organisations

South Australian Governing Council and School Board Chairs

Principals and teachers peak bodies – national

Australian Secondary Principals Association

Australian Primary Principals Association

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association

Australian Special Education Principals Association

Australian Government Primary Principals Association

Independent Primary School Heads of Australia

Peak bodies

Principals and teachers peak bodies – national (*continued*)

Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

Catholic Secondary Principals Australia

Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association

Principals and teachers peak bodies – state and territory

ACT Principals Association

Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations

Catholic Secondary Principals Association of Queensland

Queensland Association of State School Principals

Queensland Secondary Principals Association

Preschool Directors Association of South Australia

South Australian Area School Leaders Association

South Australian Primary Principals' Association

South Australian Secondary Principals' Association

Small Schools Association of South Australia

Tasmanian Principals Association

Australian Principals Federation – Victorian Branch

Principals Association of Specialist Schools Victoria

Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals

Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia – WA

Catholic Secondary Principals Association of Western Australia

Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association

Australian Government Minister for Education's Principal Reference Group

Over 100 school executives and teachers have met with the co-chairs to provide information through participation in teacher consultations across Australia. School visits included consultation with students and staff. Schools visited and individuals selected for participation in teacher roundtables were chosen randomly in partnership with local education departments and independent authorities. This ensured a variety of views were represented across primary, secondary, government, non-government, regional, and metropolitan schools.

Young people and students, school executive, teachers and support staff

School visits

Jannali High School, Jannali, NSW

McCarthy Catholic College, Tamworth, NSW

Oxley Vale Public School, Tamworth, NSW

Peel High School, Tamworth, NSW

Sylvania Heights Public School, Sylvania, NSW

Sylvania High School, Sylvania, NSW

Tamworth High School, Tamworth, NSW

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Catholic College, Alice Springs, NT

Ross Park Primary Campus, Alice Springs, NT

School support staff

NT Positive Behaviour Coaches

NT School Social Workers

Young people and student groups

Northern Territory Youth Round Table Representatives

Queensland Ministerial Student Advisory Council

South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People's Advisory Council

Victorian Student Representative Council members

Education organisations, associations and unions

Australian Alliance of Associations in Education

Australian Boarding Schools Association

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Australian Education Research Organisation

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

Education Services Australia (ESA)

Educators South Australia

Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation

Tasmanian Association for the Gifted

Australian Education Union (AEU)

Australian Education Union – Federal Branch

AEU branches and committees

AEU National Principals' Committee

AEU Yalukit Yulendj

AEU ACT Branch

AEU NT Branch

AEU SA Branch

AEU TAS Branch

AEU VIC Branch

New South Wales Teachers Federation Branch

AEU associated bodies

Queensland Teachers' Union

State School Teacher's Union of Western Australia

Independent Education Union of Australia (IEU)

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch

IEUA QLD/NT Branch

IEUA WA Branch

Other stakeholder organisations

54 Reasons

A Gender Agenda

All Means All (The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education)

Alannah and Madeline Foundation

Australian Council of Jewish Schools

Australian Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools

Autism NT

Autism Queensland

Be You (Beyond Blue)

Better Balanced Futures

Bully Zero

Canberra PCYC

Children and Young People with a Disability Australia

Classroom Mastery

Click Against Hate

Collective Shout

Community Languages Australia

CREATE Foundation

Dolly's Dream

Equality Tasmania

Executive Council of Australian Jewry

headspace

Jesuit Social Services

Macquarie Uni – My Mind Check

Minus18

National Women's Safety Alliance

Northern Territory Integrated DisAbility Action

Orygen

Our Watch

Other stakeholder organisations

Project ROCKIT

Sammy D Foundation

Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT

Smart Justice for Young People

Stymie

Together for Humanity

Top Blokes Foundation

Victorian Student Representative Council

Westjustice

Working it Out

Youthlaw

Your Town

Youth Empowered Towards Independence

Youth Pride Network and Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

Academics and experts

Professor Donna Cross – University of Western Australia

Dr Tim McDonald – Classroom Mastery

Dr Deborah Green – University of South Australia

Dr Brian Moore – University of Wollongong

Dr Marilyn Campbell – Queensland University of Technology

Professor Barbara Spears – University of South Australia

Professor Eva Kimonis – University of New South Wales

Dr Vanessa Miller – Southern Cross University

Professor Alison Calear – Australian National University

Professor Anna Sullivan – University of South Australia

Dr Fiona Longmuir – Monash University

Dr Rochelle Fogelgarn – La Trobe University

Professor Kate Reynolds – Australian National University

Appendix E – Online submissions to the Consultation Paper

Online written submissions opened on 20 May 2025 and closed on Friday 27 June, with over 1,700 submissions received.

The breakdown of submissions is as follows:

- 187 are from young people
- 1,061 are from parents or guardians
- 458 are from individuals/organisations in the education sector.

Disclaimer

We understand that many submissions, especially those that share the experiences of young people, are sensitive. For this reason, we have taken a trauma-informed approach in preparing this report. This means we have only included submissions from state and territory education departments and agencies, peak bodies, academics, researchers, and other key stakeholders, and only with their permission.

To protect the wellbeing of submitters and the wider community, and to ensure care, respect, and safety throughout the process, we have not published the names or submissions of students, parents, or families.

All submissions, whether published or not, have been carefully considered and have helped inform the Review’s findings and recommendations.

State and territory governments/education departments

- New South Wales Department of Education and NSW Education Standards Authority
- South Australian Government Department for Education
- Victorian Government Department of Education
- Western Australian Government Department of Education

Members of Parliament

- The Hon Allegra Spender MP – Federal Member for Wentworth

Non-government education stakeholders

Australian Association of Christian Schools

Christian Schools Australia

Independent Schools Australia

National Catholic Education Commission

Catholic Schools New South Wales

Queensland Catholic Education Commission

Commissioners

eSafety Commissioner

New South Wales Advocate for Children and Young People

Shona Reid, Guardian for Children and Young People – South Australia

South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People

Peak bodies

Parent peak bodies – national

Australian Parents Council

Australian Council of State School Organisations

Catholic School Parents Australia

Parent peak bodies – state and territory

Catholic School Parents South Australia

Federation of Parents and Citizen Associations New South Wales

Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations

P&Cs Queensland

Parents Victoria

Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network

Peak bodies

Principals and teachers peak bodies – national

Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia

Australian Secondary Principals' Association

Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association

Australian Government Primary Principals Association

Australian Primary Principals' Association

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals' Association

Principals and teachers peak bodies – state and territory

Australian Association of Special Education – NSW

NSW Primary Principals' Association

New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council

Regional Principals Association – WA

South Australian Secondary Principals' Association

Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations

Victorian Parents Council

Western Australian Council of State School Organisations

Young people and students, school executive, teachers and support staff

School support staff

Association for Positive Behaviour Supports Australia

Life Ed Australia and Peer Support Australia

Life Ed Queensland

Student groups

Australian Council for Student Voice

Minister's Student Council (DOVES) (NSW)

Victorian Multicultural Youth Alliance

Victorian Student Representative Council

Youth Pride Network and Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

Youth Steering Committee

Education organisations, associations and unions

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Australian Education Union (AEU)

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

Children and Young People with Disability Australia

Education Services Australia

Independent Education Union of Australia (IEU)

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation

Other stakeholder organisations

Advocacy WA

Alannah and Madeline Foundation and Dolly's Dream

All Means All – The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education

Association for Children with Disability

Australian Association of Psychologists Incorporated

Australian Multicultural Action Network

Australian Muslim Advocacy Network

Australian Psychological Society

Australian Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools

Bully Zero

Bullyproof

Canberra PCYC

CTRL+SHIFT Coalition

Centre for Multicultural Youth

Chain Reaction Foundation

Collective Shout

Community Languages Australia

Continence Health Australia

Cybernetic Shield

Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability Queensland

Other stakeholder organisations

Down Syndrome Australia Consortium

Education Economy

Equality Tasmania

Executive Council of Australian Jewry

Family Advocacy

Foundation House (The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture)

Get GRIT Program

Institute of Special Educators

JFA Purple Orange

Jesuit Social Services

KidsXpress Children's Mental Health Organisation

MYAN Australia

Missing School

Macquarie Uni – My Mind Check

New Beginnings International

New South Wales Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors

Our Watch

Project Rockit

Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma

Rationalist Society of Australia

Rotary Club of Aurora Gungahlin

STYMIE

Sammy D Foundation

Schools Can't Australia

Suicide Prevention Australia

The Embrace Collective

The Friendship Project

Top Blokes Foundation

Triple P International

UNICEF Australia

Other stakeholder organisations

URSTRONG

Unleashing Personal Potential

Victoria Legal Aid

Wellbeing Support Space

Working It Out

Working with Women Alliance – National Safety

yourtown and headspace

Youth Law Australia

Academics and experts

Associate Professor Lisa Van Leent

Australian Universities Anti-Bullying Research Alliance

Coosje Griffiths

Cordelia Attenborough, Mark Morante, Nikoletta Fytrakis and Sebastian Cordoba

Dr Bob Jackson

Dr Erin Leif

Dr Rachel Leslie

Dr Robbie Lloyd

Dr Thomas W Nielsen and Dr Jennifer Ma

Dr Zach Greig – The Stand-Up Project

Evelyn M Field OAM

G.W. Crosby & K.A. Prideaux

Jonn Hendry OAM

Ken Rigby OAM

Maggie Dent

Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research

Olga Tennison – Autism Research Centre

Professor Lee Anne Perry AM

Suzanne D Rutland OAM

Appendix F – Endnotes

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- 3 Bullying No Way, ['Bullying in schools – Facts and Figures'](#), Bullying No Way, 2024, accessed July 2025.
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- 8 Department of Education, ['Heads of Agreement \(Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025–2034\)'](#), Department of Education, Australian Government, 2025, accessed July 2025.
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- 15 Bullying No Way, ['Bullying in schools – Facts and Figures'](#), Bullying No Way, 2024, accessed July 2025.
- 16 Branley, A., ['Distress rates from school bullying higher than COVID-19 times, with children as young as 10 facing online and in-person abuse'](#), ABC News, 22 July 2025, accessed July 2025.
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