PREVENTING & ADDRESSING RACISM IN SCHOOLS

Policy

This policy supports government schools to strengthen their culture and practice to prevent and address racism, religious intolerance and racial and religious vilification. All Victorian government schools must implement this policy.

This policy supports compliance with Victoria's Child Safe Standards.

Summary

In line with Child Safe Standard 1 and Child Safe Standard 5, all Victorian government schools must actively prevent and respond to racism, and report incidents to the department. This policy covers 3 key actions:

- preventing racism: schools must maintain culturally safe and inclusive environments
- responding to racism: schools must have clear, timely, safe and inclusive processes to respond to incidents of racism
- reporting racism: schools must report incidents of racism in eduSafe Plus, as per the Managing and Reporting School Incidents (Including Emergencies) policy.

Schools must publish this policy on their website, alongside advice on how to report incidents of racism to the school and through the Report Racism hotline.

Details

Application of this policy

This policy applies to all Victorian government school staff, external practitioners, contractors and volunteers working with students.

This is a statewide policy. Schools are not required to have a local policy in addition to this policy.

The scope of this policy is primarily focused on the obligations of schools to provide culturally safe learning environments for their students. For staff who have experienced racism, refer to the Equal Opportunity – Employees policy.

Racism is not tolerated in Victorian government schools

Racism is not tolerated in Victorian government schools. Racism has significant detrimental impacts on mental health, learning and engagement, and contributes to disadvantage and isolation of young people. Refer to Key terminology and examples of forms of racism on the guidance tab for an explanation of racism and other key terminology used in this policy.

First Nations students

To comply with Child Safe Standard 1, as well as to support Marrung and the findings of the Strengthening Aboriginal Self-Determination in Education report (PDF), all government schools must establish a culturally safe environment, free from racism, for First Nations students, families, carers and communities.

Racism experienced by First Nations students, families, carers and communities comes in a range of forms, including (but not limited to), denial of self-determination, unconscious bias, stereotyping, and derogatory language, leading to lower expectations and reduced opportunities for First Nations students. Racism is often exacerbated by cultural bias and lack of understanding about the ongoing impacts of colonisation and injustices such as the forced removal of First Nations children from their families (known as the Stolen Generations), and this can perpetuate exclusion and culturally unsafe practices in schools.

Students who experience higher levels of racism or religious intolerance

Data shows that First Nations students, students from African and Pasifika backgrounds and students from refugee backgrounds experience racism at higher rates than their peers. Students of faith, including Jewish and Muslim students, can experience religious intolerance such as antisemitism and Islamophobia. Refer to the Resources tab for targeted guidance and programs to assist in preventing racism that can be experienced by these cohorts.

Preventing racism

Creating a culturally safe and inclusive environment

Child Safe Standard 1 requires schools to:

- provide a culturally safe, nurturing and inclusive environment for First Nations children and young people, where the 3 elements of cultural safety are implemented:
    - understanding identity
    - respecting culture
    - eliminating racism and abuse
- adopt measures to ensure racism is identified, confronted and not tolerated
- develop and implement supportive and culturally safe processes for addressing racism.

Schools must be culturally safe for current and prospective First Nations students, families, carers and communities.

Child Safe Standard 5 requires schools to:

- create environments where all children and young people feel welcome, their diversity is valued, and their needs are identified and are being met
- provide a safe, nurturing and inclusive environment for students from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds.

Students need to see and feel that their identity is reflected, understood and respected in their school.

Refer to Preventing racism on the guidance tab for strategies on how to provide a culturally safe and inclusive environment.

Building staff capability to prevent and respond to racism and ensure cultural safety

Child Safe Standard 5 requires schools to make sure that staff and volunteers understand the diverse circumstances of students and how to provide support to vulnerable students.

Schools can support this standard by providing opportunities for staff to undertake training on cultural competency, cultural safety, unconscious bias, or inclusive education practices (for example, Community Understanding and Safety Training). Refer to the Resources tab for more professional learning options.

Promoting cultural diversity and inclusion in teaching and learning

The Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0 will assist in strengthening understanding of cultural diversity and inclusion. Intercultural Capability and other cross-curriculum priorities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures and Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia, must be taught in all Victorian government schools. Holocaust Education, part of the History curriculum, must also be taught in all Victorian government secondary schools.

Under the Teaching and Learning Resources – Selecting Appropriate Materials policy, schools must avoid using culturally insensitive imagery. Schools should also find ways to identify and address unconscious bias in images or language and try to ensure that teaching and learning materials and resources reflect the diversity of their school community.

Refer to Preventing racism on the guidance tab for more detail and the Resources tab on teaching and learning.

Responding to racism

The Managing and Reporting School Incidents (Including Emergencies) policy requires schools to manage and respond to all reported incidents of racism that occur in school. Schools may be required to offer support and implement safety

measures for students affected by racism incidents occurring outside of school, if those incidents are impacting students at school.

To implement timely, proportionate, safe, and inclusive responses, schools should:

- reassure the student (or parent) that the school believes their report and that it will be taken seriously
- consider the impact on the student, which may be different than the intent of the student who engaged in racism
- identify family or community members that the student trusts and who may be able to support the response process. This is particularly important for First Nations students to promote self-determination
- use educative and restorative approaches with the aim of restoring the relationships between the students, families, carers, staff and communities involved
- ensure affected students and their families or carers are informed of the school response, in line with privacy requirements.

Refer to Responding to and reporting racism on the guidance tab for more detail on responding to incidents of racism, including step-by-step response guides and templates.

Reporting racism

Reporting racist incidents in eduSafe Plus or to the Incident Support and Operations Centre

Under the Managing and Reporting School Incidents (Including Emergencies) policy schools must report incidents of racism, religious intolerance, and racial and religious vilification in eduSafe Plus, or by calling the Incident Support and Operations Centre (ISOC) on 1800 126 126.

Regional and central staff will support schools as required, following an eduSafe Plus report depending on the nature and severity of the incident.

Schools must ensure that everyone involved in the incident is informed of the school's response to the incident, while maintaining privacy requirements.

Communicating this policy

Schools must communicate this policy within their school community and encourage students, families and carers to report incidents of racism by placing a link to it on their website including:

- advice on what to do if racism has been experienced or witnessed at school including how to report incidents of racism to school
- how to report incidents of racism via the Report Racism Hotline.

Refer to the Resource Tab – Communicating with your school community for suggested website text.

Schools should also consider the needs of their school community in communicating this policy to ensure it is accessible and understood. This may include translations and providing opportunities for open conversations about the policy and its implementation. Translations will be made available to schools late in Term 2.

Schools are required to attest to their compliance with Child Safe Standards as part of their Annual Report to the School Community. Schools can also use their Annual Report to the School Community to share steps they are taking to improve cultural safety and prevent racism.

- Behaviour – Students
- Bullying Prevention and Response
- Child Safe Standards
- Complaint Resolution
- Duty of Care
- EAL Support and Funding
- Equal Opportunity – Employees
- Equal Opportunity and Human Rights – Students
- Holocaust Education – Delivery Requirements
- Interpreting and Translation Services
- Koorie Education
- Managing Conduct and Unsatisfactory Performance in the Teaching Service
- Managing and Reporting School Incidents (Including Emergencies)
- Mental Health in Schools
- Mental Health Fund and Menu
- Respectful behaviours within the school community
- Respectful Workplaces
- School Community Safety Orders
- Student Engagement
- Teaching and Learning Resources – Selecting Appropriate Materials

Relevant legislation

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)
- Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)

Contacts

To report racism, students, families and carers can contact their school or:

- Report Racism hotline
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI)
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

- Australian Human Rights Commission

For additional support following an incident of racism:

- First Nations students, staff or families can contact Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI)
- Jewish students, staff or families can contact the Jewish Community Council of Victoria
- Muslim students, staff or families can contact the Islamic Council of Victoria.

For support with the Preventing and Addressing Racism in Schools policy, schools, areas and regions may direct queries to the Multicultural and Refugee Supports Unit (email: multicultural.education@education.vic.gov.au).