National Safe Schools Framework

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1. INTRODUCTION

All State and Territory government and non-government education authorities, and the Commonwealth, are committed to working together to ensure the wellbeing of all Australian students.

A scan of State and Territory government and non-government education authorities, conducted in November 2002, revealed a range of excellent practices that clearly showed that each jurisdiction asserts the rights of all students to be safe and supported.

Typical jurisdictional practices to prevent and respond to bullying, harassment, violence, and child abuse and neglect, identified in the scan, include:

- Providing guidance and advice to schools in the development of written policies;
- Encouraging and promoting whole-school approaches, including the involvement of parents through workshops, school boards, and associations representing parents, carers and community members;
- Including child protection education in the school curriculum, as well as content that explores discriminatory behaviours through an understanding of social factors such as gender, race, sexuality, disability and religion;
- Providing professional development and training for school staff on, for example, methods of countering bullying and harassment, child protection legislation and procedures (including mandatory reporting), and identifying and understanding child abuse, including the needs of victims;
- Providing resources to teachers on helping students to recognise/report abuse, and build protective behaviours, resilience and optimism;
- Encouraging schools to empower students by involving them in the decision making and resolution processes through, for example, training in peer mediation or adoption of 'buddy' systems;
- Providing specialist support, including for teachers who encounter or report abuse and who work with students who are persistently aggressive, such as behaviour teachers and consultants, anti-harassment officers, school counsellors, psychological consultants and school based police constables; and by
- Conducting police checks on school personnel.

The National Safe Schools Framework incorporates existing good practice and provides an agreed national approach to help schools and their communities address issues of bullying, harassment, violence, and child abuse and neglect.

2. CONTEXT

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) on 19 July 2002 agreed to the development, by January 2003, of a national framework for ensuring safe and supportive school environments. Council decided that the framework should be developed by the MCEETYA Taskforce on Student Learning and Support Services and agreed to jurisdictions reporting through the annual *National Report on Schooling in Australia* on their strategies and initiatives to provide safe, supportive learning environments.

Promoting and providing a supportive learning environment in which all students can expect to feel safe is an essential function of all schools. Students have a fundamental right to learn in a safe, supportive environment and to be treated with respect. The Australian community rightly expects authorities charged with managing our schools, both in the government and non-government sectors, to take all available measures to ensure the safety of students, to support students and to set out clearly, transparently and explicitly the policies and programmes they have in place to fulfil this important responsibility.

Schools are among the safest places in the community for children and young people. Much good work has already been undertaken and continues to be undertaken by all school jurisdictions to provide a safe and supportive environment. The National Framework identifies strategies that can inform practice which enhances school safety and students' physical, social and emotional wellbeing.

The Framework is a collaborative effort by the Commonwealth and State and Territory government and non-government school authorities and other key stakeholders. It presents a way of achieving a shared vision of physical and emotional safety and wellbeing for all students in all Australian schools. The Framework recognises the need for sustained positive approaches that include an appreciation of the ways in which social attitudes and values impact on the behaviour of students in our school communities. Such approaches encourage all members of the school community to:
- value diversity
- contribute positively to the safety and wellbeing of themselves and others
- act independently, justly, cooperatively and responsibly in school, work, civic and family relationships
- contribute to the implementation of appropriate strategies that create and maintain a safe and supportive learning environment.

The aim of the Framework is to assist all school communities in building safe and supportive schools where:
- bullying, harassment and violence are minimised;
- students receive support on issues related to child abuse and neglect.

The Framework is underpinned by a set of guiding principles and related key elements/approaches that schools can put in place to effectively provide a safe and supportive learning environment.

3. VISION

The National Safe Schools Framework is based on the following overarching vision:

All Australian schools are safe and supportive environments.

4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE PROVISION OF A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Australian schools:

1. affirm the right of all school community members to feel safe at school

2. promote care, respect and cooperation, and value diversity

3. implement policies, programmes and processes to nurture a safe and supportive school environment

4. recognise that quality leadership is an essential element that underpins the creation of a safe and supportive school environment

5. develop and implement policies and programmes through processes that engage the whole school community

6. ensure that roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community in promoting a safe and supportive environment are explicit, clearly understood and disseminated

7. recognise the critical importance of pre-service and ongoing professional development in creating a safe and supportive school environment

8. have a responsibility to provide opportunities for students to learn through the formal curriculum the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for positive relationships

9. focus on policies that are proactive and oriented towards prevention and intervention

10. regularly monitor and evaluate their policies and programmes so that evidence-based practice supports decisions and improvements

11. take action to protect children from all forms of abuse and neglect

5. KEY ELEMENTS/ APPROACHES THAT INFORM GOOD PRACTICE

Outlined below are the key elements stemming from the Guiding Principles that a school would have in place to effectively prevent and respond to bullying, harassment and violence, and child abuse and neglect. These are accompanied by a range of suggested approaches designed to support schools in providing a safe and supportive environment, and to assist them to reflect on their existing practices and plan for improvement. These approaches are not intended to be exhaustive, but are examples of good practice to guide schools in creating and maintaining safe and supportive learning environments. Examples of ideas about whole-school approaches to the issues can also be found on the *Bullying. No way*! website at www.bullyingnoway.com.au.

Guiding Principle	Key Elements	Suggested Approaches
1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11	School values, ethos, culture, structures and student welfare	Leadership is committed to a shared vision of a positive and inclusive school. Such commitment includes resourcing and endorsement of policies, programmes and procedures. Parent, student, teacher and school community commitment is established and ongoing through: ❑ the development of active, trusting relationships; ❑ fostering shared awareness about the diverse needs and viewpoints of the school community; and ❑ democratic decision making and leadership structures such as School Boards/Councils. Pastoral care or student welfare systems/ student support teams and systems are in place. The school develops programmes and strategies to empower students to participate in a positive school culture, e.g. peer support systems. Positive relationships are established between schools, agencies and community groups with a related or complementary function.
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11	Establishment of agreed policies, programmes and procedures	Policies, programmes and procedures are developed in collaboration with staff, students and parents, and include a statement of rights and responsibilities of members of the school community, including visitors. They also include – (i) *in relation to bullying, harassment and violence:* ❑ an agreed definition of bullying, harassment and violence or, an agreed statement of expected and unacceptable behaviour in relation to bullying, harassment and violence, and a statement of consequences for unacceptable behaviour; and

		□ a coordinated whole school plan outlining how the issues are to be addressed. (ii) *in relation to child protection:* □ an explicit aim of eliminating the risk of child abuse by staff/ visitors; □ comprehensive screening of applicants for employment, student teachers and volunteers before they become involved in school activities, bearing in mind that few child sex offenders have criminal records; □ safe procedures for staff who work alone with students; and □ procedures for the reporting of abuse by staff. Policies, programmes and procedures are developed, disseminated and promoted across the whole school community in a way that is sensitive to parents, students and community members from diverse backgrounds. Policies, programmes and procedures are integrated with existing policies and procedures, for example, Behaviour Management, Sexual Harassment and Racial Harassment. Periodic evaluation of policies, programmes and procedures is undertaken and includes: □ auditing the school's policies/ strategies; □ reviewing bullying and safety issues through surveys of staff, students and parents; and □ analysing evaluation data to inform future planning needs and practice. Risk assessment procedures, within and outside school, are in place. For example, risk minimisation through appropriate supervision, environmental design and targeted programmes for students at risk (e.g. pro-social skills development).
2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11	Provision of education/ training ● School staff ● Students ● Parents	<u>School Staff</u> Appropriate pre-service and in-service training is conducted for all staff about bullying, violence, harassment and child protection issues. Training for all staff in: (i) *in relation to bullying, harassment and violence:* □ understanding what is happening in the school, making use of appropriate information gathering methods and related discussion; □ positive student management;

- knowledge and skills relating to methods of addressing bullying and harassment;
- identifying and dealing with prejudice and discrimination, for example, as they relate to gender, race, sexuality, disability and other factors; and
- understanding the effects of bullying and harassment on children and young people.

(ii) in relation to child protection:
- recognising and responding to indicators of child abuse and neglect;
- understanding the effects of abuse and neglect on the development of children and young people;
- complying with agreed policies and procedures related to child protection;
- keeping themselves safe; and
- personal safety/child protection curricula.

Relevant additional training is conducted for staff with specific roles in child protection to:
- provide support to students who are the subject of concerns about abuse or neglect; and
- fulfill agreed responsibilities.

Residential care training for all boarding school staff is conducted.

Students

Effective curricula, programmes and pedagogy enable students to make use of empowering processes that increase safety and provide students with the means to solve their own problems and learn important lifelong relationship and citizenship skills.

Comprehensive, realistic, developmentally appropriate personal safety component within the curriculum enables students to:
- recognise and report abuse;
- understand power in relationships;
- develop protective strategies, including help-seeking behaviours; and
- create positive, healthy relationships (sexual and social).

Age-appropriate curriculum content and pedagogy relating to bullying, harassment, and violence, enables students to learn, for example:
- skills for forming and maintaining positive, non-coercive relationships including differentiating between

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assertiveness and aggression;
- ❑ methods of conflict resolution;
- ❑ how bystanders can discourage bullying and harassment;
- ❑ the development of cooperativeness, empathy and respect; and
- ❑ how to identify and address prejudice and discrimination, for example, as they relate to gender, race, sexuality, disability and other factors.

<u>Parents</u>

Parents have an increased knowledge of strategies, options and ideas through:
- ❑ engagement in whole school planning processes;
- ❑ parent information sessions (e.g., on bullying, child protection, supporting children); and
- ❑ access to community based resources and information on developing effective relationships and behaviour in children.
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<td>Managing incidents of abuse/victimisation</td>
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Cases of abuse/victimisation are identified and reported. This includes –

(i) *for bullying, harassment and violence*:
- ❑ explicitly encouraging all members of the school community to take a proactive stand against bullying and violence;
- ❑ involving students and staff in identifying where bullying occurs;
- ❑ developing procedures to encourage early identification of incidents;
- ❑ responding proactively to signs and symptoms of bullying, harassment and violence;
- ❑ creating opportunities for students to share concerns;
- ❑ encouraging students to seek immediate help when bullying is witnessed or experienced;
- ❑ encouraging parents to identify and report bullying and harassment issues that have been observed or discussed by students to staff.

(ii) *for child protection:*
- ❑ implementing requirements of child abuse reporting legislation, as appropriate;
- ❑ identifying the indicators of all forms of child abuse and neglect;
- ❑ developing teachers' empathic listening skills;
- ❑ implementing support and monitoring strategies, both
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		immediate and long-term.
		Steps and outcomes for managing incidents are clearly documented in order to facilitate evaluation and justify possible modification in approaches. In responding to individual cases of bullying, harassment, violence or abuse, strategies: ❑ are effectively matched to the incident; ❑ include parental education and involvement in their planning and implementation; and ❑ involve other agencies/ services as appropriate (e.g., police) and the implementation of individual case management systems through collaborative planning. The support of relevant specialists is enlisted, including support for staff dealing with child abuse cases.
1, 3, 4, 10	Providing support for students	Support is provided for students involved in bullying, harassment and violence and who have experienced abuse or neglect: ❑ focuses on restoring the wellbeing of students who have been affected by abuse or victimisation, through the provision of adequate social support and counselling; ❑ maintains their connectedness to schooling, including facilitating reintegration into the school of those involved in harmful behaviour (e.g., through restorative justice practices); and ❑ provides opportunities for individual students to develop more socially appropriate behaviour and coping skills, as relevant.
3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11	Working closely with parents	Schools work closely with parents to prevent bullying, harassment and violence, informing and consulting with them on relevant issues, especially when their children become involved in incidents, either as perpetrators, victims or both. Parent participation is a key component of the child protection programme for children – for example, through parent information sessions, workshops and joint child-parent homework – enabling parents to reinforce safety concepts and strategies at home. There is an emphasis on increasing students' confidence and more open child-parent relationships.

6. GLOSSARY

Bullying and Harassment

"Bullying and harassment are often thought of separately; however both involve a more powerful person or group oppressing a less powerful person or group, often on the grounds of 'difference' … These differences can be related to culture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, ability or disability, religion, body size and physical appearance, personality, age, marital status, parenting status or economic status." (*Bullying. No way*! National website)

Child abuse

Child abuse refers to the "maltreatment of a child, especially by emotional or physical violence or sexual interference". (*Australian Oxford Dictionary*)

"Child abuse and neglect refer to acts of omission and acts of commission that are potentially harmful to the child." (*Professor Freda Briggs*)

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse refers to the use of children under the age of consent (as defined in different jurisdictions) for sexual gratification. (*Professor Freda Briggs*)

Child sexual abuse may include sexual abuse by school peers.

Connectedness

A person's sense of belonging and connectedness with others, including family and school. Connectedness within a school community has been linked to enhancing health and wellbeing.

Evaluation

The process of measuring the value of a program or intervention. It is a structured, staged process of identifying, collecting and considering information to determine goals, progress and outcomes. Evaluation is central to good practice and ensuring an evidence-based approach to school safety.

Principles

A statement encapsulating a fundamental concept for action that guides effective practice. The principles in this document are recommended guidelines for schools in providing a safe school environment.

Restorative justice practices

Restorative justice approaches use the incident of misbehaviour as an educative opportunity for repairing the harm and fostering more socially responsible relationships and behaviours that take others' perspectives into account. This is achieved through carefully structured opportunities for individuals to understand the impact of their actions, recognise their social

responsibilities and make amends to those who have been affected by their actions. The young person is also assisted to reintegrate successfully into the school community. The most common form of restorative justice is community conferencing.

Safe and supportive school environments

In the context of the National Safe Schools Framework, 'safe and supportive schools' refers to the provision of an environment that protects the emotional, psychological and physical well-being of students. In 'safe school environments' children are to be protected from verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, including indirect forms of abuse, such as discrimination, exclusion and isolation by their peers.

School community

The school community is considered to comprise students, school staff (for example, teachers and other professionals, administrators, other support staff and volunteers) and parents/guardians and other carers.

Violence

"Unlike bullying and harassment, violence is not necessarily associated with an imbalance of power. It can occur between people of equal power … It implies extreme forcefulness, usually (but not always) of a physical kind." (*Dr Ken Rigby*)

Wider school community

The wider school community includes individuals, groups and agencies who work together with the school community to achieve the best educational and personal outcomes for students, for example, health, youth and welfare professionals or agencies, community and church groups and the police.

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