

Statement of Intent: Our shared commitment

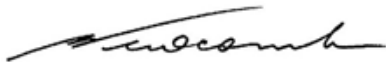
26 March 2021

The role of schools in strengthening children and young people's understanding of consent, and preventing and responding to sexual assault and sexual violence among young people.



NSW Department of Education

and



Association of Independent Schools of NSW

and



Catholic Schools NSW

Our Commitment

Recent testimonies by young women have raised awareness of the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual violence among children and young people. This requires a coordinated and collaborative community-wide response in which schools have an important role. Many young people have called for better consent education at school. The NSW curriculum currently includes age-appropriate relationship and consent education from the early years of schooling, but more needs to be done.

This Statement of Intent is a commitment on behalf of the NSW school sectors, which have responsibility for more than 3,000 schools. We commit to identifying and taking concrete actions that will strengthen children and young people's ability to form healthy relationships and prevent harmful situations, both at school and outside the school gates. Individual schools, school systems and parent organisations may choose to explicitly adopt this Statement of Intent as the basis for action within their school communities.

Our Shared Beliefs

Our response to this challenge is informed by the following shared beliefs:

- Parents are the first and continuing educators of their children.
- All children and young people have a right to feel safe, respected and valued at school and in the community.
- All schools are committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- The voice and experience of students is critical in strengthening healthy and respectful relationships and must inform what we do.
- Building healthy and respectful relationships is everyone's responsibility and schools, in partnership with parents and the broader community, have a vital role and specific responsibility.
- Schools have a duty to respond when students disclose allegations of sexual abuse and other harmful sexual behaviours, and to help students access protective, therapeutic, justice and other support services.
- Schools have responsibilities to the families and communities they serve to support the development of healthy and respectful relationships, and help prevent harmful behaviours in culturally safe ways.
- Research, evidence and best practice should inform the work that supports children and young people in addressing these issues.

What We Will Do Next

This Statement is only the first step and cannot capture all the work that needs to happen in schools and school systems. Schools will work with their families, community organisations, government agencies and most importantly the children and young people in their care.

We outline below some key areas of focus as we develop more detailed plans and projects, individually and together.

Promoting student voice and agency

We will continue to work with student groups representing diverse communities, backgrounds and perspectives: including the NSW Youth Advisory Council, the Minister's Student Council and the Regional Youth Taskforce. We will continue to listen to their views about harmful sexual behaviours and how best to prevent them, and find ways to increase the voice of our students.

We shared a draft of this Statement with the NSW Youth Advisory Council. They told us:

- We need to be clear and specific about the things we are going to change
- Student voice and student input is critical
- Students are individuals with their own rights to age-appropriate information
- Action at the individual school level is what will make a difference
- We need to hold ourselves accountable for turning this Statement into meaningful action at all levels.

Working as equal partners with parents and carers

Families and carers are critical partners in supporting children and young people in their intellectual, social, emotional and moral development, including as key role models. As the primary and continuing educators of their children, parents and guardians have an important role supporting broader cultural change and responses to harmful sexual behaviour.

We will engage parent representative associations in genuine dialogue regarding the development and implementation of the strategies stemming from this Statement to ensure that we understand and effectively respond to the rights and perspectives of parents and carers, as well as the rights and perspectives of children and young people.

Providing quality curriculum

Respectful relationships and consent education is already included in the NSW school curriculum. Together with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), we will ensure that curriculum remains current, robust, based on best-practice principles, supported by quality resources, and delivered in ways that meet the needs of all children and young people in their communities. The curriculum reform process that is underway provides a basis for this work.

We will also make sure that curriculum content and resources are transparent and accessible for parents, so that parents and carers can engage with their children and with schools.

Supporting teachers and leaders

NSW teachers and school leaders use many different types of resources and guides to help them address challenging issues. It is important that these supports have currency, are culturally appropriate and meet the needs of children and young people in all school communities.

We will review existing resources, guidance, professional learning, referral pathways, reporting protocols and responsibilities to make sure that our teachers and school leaders have what they need to support their students effectively.

Our Partners

We will consult and collaborate with our key parent, Aboriginal and other cultural representative groups.

We will collaborate with key government agencies to help support parental and community engagement with these important issues, in collaboration with their schools. This starts with the Australian Human Rights Commission roundtable on 26 March 2021.

We will also work closely with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), NSW Advocate for Children & Young People, NSW Children's Guardian, NSW Police Force, Department of Communities & Justice, and the Department of Health.