

Consultation Paper

The Review

On 16 February 2025, the Australian Government announced an expert led rapid review (the Review) into bullying in Australian schools to inform the development of a national standard. We understand that bullying can extend beyond the school gate but for the purposes of this review the focus is on bullying of students in school. The terms of reference for the Review are at:

<https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review/resources/terms-reference>.

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, they will be less likely to experience bullying but if they do, it will be managed in an appropriate way.

Dr Charlotte Keating and Dr Jo Robinson AM have been appointed as the co-chairs of the Review and the Review will be supported by a reference group to advise on education system and policy issues.

You can read more about the Review co-chairs here: <https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review>.

Consultation

We are consulting with parents, caregivers, teachers, principals and associations, children and young people, parent groups, representative bodies, school peaks, unions, and government agencies between **March and July 2025**. This will include both in-person and online engagement as well as a written feedback process. Questions that may help inform your feedback to the Review are below.

Retelling an experience with bullying can be difficult. We encourage you to access any support you may need. Some avenues of support include:

Lifeline - <https://www.lifeline.org.au/> or phone 13 11 14

13YARN – <https://www.13yarn.org.au/> or phone 13 92 76

Kids Helpline - <https://kidshelpline.com.au/> or phone 1800 55 1800

Dolly's Dream Support Line - delivered by Kids Helpline in partnership with Dolly's Dream, <https://www.dollysdream.org.au/what-we-do/support-line/> for webchat or phone 0488 881 033

Beyond Blue - <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

headspace - <https://headspace.org.au/>

Context for the Review and Consultations

Definition

The Review applies the following national bullying definition outlined by Bullying No Wayⁱ:

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.

Prevalence

There is no current consistent national prevalence rate for bullying in Australian schools. Prevalence can vary due to the methodology used, across student age ranges (with peaks at certain ages and transition points), and between subgroups of students. Establishing prevalence is also impacted by lack of standard data collection practices across Australia and students' willingness to disclose bullying – with many not reporting this due to fear of not being believed or of making things worse or because they think nothing will be done.

Being mindful of the above, available evidenceⁱⁱ shows:

- 20% of young people aged under 18 report experiencing online bullying ('cyberbullying') in any one year, with students aged 10 to 15 most likely to be involved.
- 84% of students who were bullied online were also bullied in person.
- Students from equity cohorts are more likely to experience bullying, with for example 50% of families and caregivers of people with disability reporting their child had experienced physical or psychological bullying in school.

Evidence also shows that bullying impacts wider school communities, with peers present as onlookers in 85% of bullying interactionsⁱⁱⁱ. Similarly, 89% of parents of children experiencing bullying reported the situation had impacted the whole family, for example through feelings of anxiety, worry and guilt^{iv}. School leaders and staff are also frequently required to respond to bullying, with over one third of Australian lower secondary school principals reporting that intimidation or bullying among students occurs at least weekly^v.

Bullying results in a range of significant detrimental physical and mental health and wellbeing impacts. In schools, bullying undermines student wellbeing, attendance, engagement and learning outcomes and can result in long-term impacts for those who are bullied, those who bully, witnesses and whole-school communities^{vi}.

While the effects of bullying are specific to each individual, children who experience bullying are more likely to have poor academic performance and are at greater risk of mental health concerns, suicide and self-harm, and of struggling with life transition points^{vii}. Children who bully are more likely to engage in criminal offending and substance abuse, have poor educational and employment

outcomes and experience depression later in life^{viii}, while bystanders can experience moral distress and social anxiety^{ix}.

In 2018, PwC estimated* the total cost of bullying in schools to be \$2.4 billion for each individual school year group – this is incurred while the children are in school and for the following 20 years.

Together, these data provide a picture of both the cost and the long-term psychological impacts of bullying, plus impacts on long-term productivity, health and relationships for whole-school communities, and links with increased rates of family violence.

Current anti-bullying policies and practices in schools

Beyond being places of learning, schools are universal community-based touchpoints that can play a critical role in preventing and addressing bullying by:

- promoting a positive whole-school approach to safety and wellbeing
- early identification
- directly addressing bullying and its causes
- providing support to students who are impacted.

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.

Many Australian schools, across all sectors, have anti-bullying policies designed to create safe and inclusive learning environments. These policies vary by jurisdiction and school but generally align with national frameworks such as the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework^{xi} and state-specific education department guidelines. These policies focus on addressing bullying through reporting and response mechanisms, support for affected students, disciplinary actions and parental and community involvement. There are also 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.

Questions to guide submissions and consultations

Consultation during the Review will help inform advice on:

- Best practice in relation to preventing and responding to bullying in schools.
- Types of actions, resources and supports that are working to address or prevent bullying in Australian schools.
- Possible models and content for a consistent national standard for responding to bullying in schools and its underlying causes in school contexts.

If you are:

- a student or past student
- a parent or caregiver
- a person who works in the education system
- an interested organisation who works with school-aged young people and families or represents parents or people in the education system

We are interested in your views on the above matters regarding bullying in schools. These could be based on your personal experience or exposure to bullying in schools and what worked or did not work at the school level to address or prevent bullying. This will help the Review to make recommendations on what needs to be strengthened to ensure children and parents can be confident that no matter where a child goes to school, if they are experiencing bullying, it will be managed in an appropriate way.

The suggested questions below may help inform your feedback to the Review. You do not need to answer all questions to make a submission, and you can include further suggestions beyond the questions listed.

Questions for students, young people and families

1. If you or a family member experienced bullying in school, were you aware of the supports available from the school to help you or your family member?
 - a. If you reported the bullying to the school, what actions did they take in response?
 - b. Did you feel the response from the school helped? If not, how could this have been improved?
 - c. Do you have any other suggestions on how all schools can better prevent and address bullying that could relate to a national standard?
2. We are aware that some people are more likely to experience bullying and may have different needs when bullying is being responded to. For example, are you Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a person with disability, an LGBTIQ+ person, a person from an educationally disadvantaged background (i.e. you live in a low socio-economic area or you are disadvantaged due to your social class, race, ethnicity or gender) or a person living in a rural or remote area?
 - a. If yes, do you think your school's response provided you the appropriate related supports?
 - b. How could a consistent national standard ensure that schools' bullying prevention and responses are appropriately tailored, and accessible to you?
3. If you witnessed bullying, what helped, or could have helped, in addressing the situation?
4. If you are a parent or caregiver of a person who was bullied, what did the school do well to support your child and to communicate with you? What practices could be improved?

Questions for people in the education system and other stakeholders

1. What policies, models and/or practices (i.e. interventions) do you feel are successful in helping prevent and address bullying in schools? Describe the effectiveness of these approaches at a whole of school community level.
 - a. Is there any student or community participation in the development, implementation and review of policies, models or practices to prevent and address bullying in your school?
2. What policies, models or practices (i.e. interventions) do you feel are not working?
3. What changes do you think are needed to improve bullying prevention and response:
 - a. from a whole of school perspective?
 - b. from an education system perspective?
4. What do you think the underlying causes of bullying in schools are?

5. What resources are available for school staff to support action on bullying? What else would help build capability to support staff to prevent and manage bullying?
6. Do you have students attending your school who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, have a disability, identify as LGBTIQ+, are from an educationally disadvantaged background (i.e. you live in a low socio-economic area or you are disadvantaged due to your social class, race, ethnicity or gender), **or** live in a rural or remote area?
 - a. If yes, does your school have the capacity to offer appropriate tailored supports?
 - b. How could a consistent national standard ensure that schools' bullying prevention activities and responses are appropriately tailored, and accessible to all students including equity groups?
7. What reporting is in place to support action on bullying?
8. What guiding principles or other elements could be helpful in developing a consistent national standard for responding to bullying?

Contact details

The Review team may contact you to discuss your submission further. If you are interested in being contacted, please provide your contact details with your submission. Alternatively, you can choose to remain anonymous.

Contact for more information

For more information on the Review, contact the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review Taskforce at the Australian Government Department of Education at:

Email – ABRRConsultations@education.gov.au

Website – <https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review>

ⁱ Bullying No Way (2023), *Understanding Bullying*: www.bullyingnoway.gov.au/understanding-bullying.

ⁱⁱ Various sources:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), *Mental health findings for LGBTQ+ Australians*:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/mental-health-findings-lgbtq-australians>;

- Australian Government Productivity Commission (2020), *Mental Health Inquiry Report*:

www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report;

- Bullying No Way (2024), *Bullying Research*: www.bullyingnoway.gov.au/understanding-bullying/bullying-research;

- Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2023), *How deep does it go? Australian students with disability and their experience of entrenched inequity in education*: www.cyda.org.au/how-deep-does-it-go-australian-students-with-disability-and-their-experience-of-entrenched-inequity-in-education; and

- Dr L O'Brien AM et al (2023), *Improving Outcomes for All: The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System*: www.education.gov.au/review-inform-better-and-fairer-education-system/resources/expert-panels-report.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bullying No Way (2024), *Bullying Research*: www.bullyingnoway.gov.au/understanding-bullying/bullying-research

^{iv} Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne (2018), *National Child Health Poll*: www.rchpoll.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/bullying-hurts-parents-too-poll-finds-media-release.pdf

^v Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2023), *Spotlight: Australia's teacher workforce today*: www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlights/australia-s-teacher-workforce-today

^{vi} Various sources:

- Australian Government Productivity Commission (2020), *Mental Health Inquiry Report*:

www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report; and

-Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022), *Australia's Children*: www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/justice-safety/bullying.

^{vii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022), *Australia's Children*: www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/justice-safety/bullying.

^{viii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022), *Australia's Children*: www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/justice-safety/bullying.

^{ix} Bullying No Way (2015), *Research snapshot from a literature review by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group*: <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/understanding/Documents/research-snapshots-bullying-combined.pdf>

^x PwC Australia (2018), *The economic cost of bullying in Australian schools*: <https://www.stoppestennu.nl/sites/default/files/uploads/amf-report-190218-f.pdf>.

^{xi} Student Wellbeing Hub, *Australian Student Wellbeing Framework*: <https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/framework/>