
SCHOOL POLICY & FUNDING ADVISORY COUNCIL

OFFICIAL STATEMENT NO.11: MARCH 2021

STAFF AND STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The COVID-19 pandemic, including prolonged lockdowns, school closures, and the move to remote and flexible learning, as well as ongoing recovery from the 2019-2020 bushfires, have caused sustained challenges for school communities.

Council recognised the ongoing efforts of staff and students across all school sectors to maintain continuity in education, noting that some are feeling fatigued and unsettled. Council agreed to continue to collaborate and share resources for supporting staff and student mental health and wellbeing across sectors.

Council discussed the release of the final report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Services, which outlines a comprehensive set of recommendations on how best to support Victorians with mental illness. Council reflected on the important role schools play both in providing a protective environment for students and identifying students who are at risk of mental health disorders or in need of further support.

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS AND CONSENT EDUCATION

Council recognised the importance of engaging schools, including students, parents and the wider school community, in addressing society-wide issues relating to gender inequality, consent, sexual assault and harassment.

As part of the cross-sector response to these issues, all government schools and over 300 non-government schools will now be delivering the Victorian Government's Respectful Relationships program, which includes education on issues regarding consent, respect, and gender equality.

The Department, ISV and CECV will continue to explore cross-sector responses to these issues and collaborate to support the delivery of respectful relationships and consent education in schools, including sharing resources to equip teachers with the confidence and knowledge needed to teach students about issues relating to consent and respectful relationships.

THE 2021 AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT CENSUS

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) collection will take place from 3 May to 20 July 2021. In preparation for the collection, the Department, CECV and ISV have been collaborating to provide schools with information and resources on the benefits and uses of the data to encourage school participation.

The 2021 data collection will provide Australia with more than ten years' worth of data on childhood development at entry to school, which can help understand what is being done well and what needs to be improved to support healthy child development and positive outcomes for students.

REGULATORY POLICY UPDATE

Council discussed key developments in regulatory policy that seek to ensure child safety.

Public consultation on proposed amendments to the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* and a Regulatory Impact Statement was finalised in February 2021. The proposed regulations respond to

the recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that boarding schools should be monitored to ensure they meet the Child Safe Standards.

Council acknowledged the significant work that has occurred in the Catholic school sector to comply with the requirement in the Targeted Programs Funding Agreements for non-government schools to demonstrate incorporation and to maintain insurance covering their liability against child sexual abuse claims.

COUNCIL 2021 WORK PLAN AND PRIORITIES

Council reaffirmed its continued focus on its [priority work areas](#) agreed to in 2019 (of education quality, access and inclusion and funding and financial accountability), with some expansions to the workplan to include the significant cross-sector collaboration occurring in response to COVID-19 and bushfires and on respectful relationships and consent education.

Notable highlights of progress of Council's priorities include:

- the completion of the Student Leaders for Multicultural Inclusion initiative and the development of the 'Student Leaders for Multicultural Inclusion: Strengthening Student Voice Leadership and Agency' resource for schools to support collaboration to improve multicultural awareness and inclusion
- the beginning of phase two of the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS), the Family Violence Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) on 19 April 2021, which will allow government, Catholic and independent schools to request and share information to promote child wellbeing or safety and assess and manage family violence risk.

ABOUT

Established in 2015, the School Policy and Funding Advisory Council (Council) provides advice to the Minister for Education on regulatory, policy and funding issues that affect public and non-government schools.

Council meets three times each year and Official Statements are shared with the school community after each meeting. The Department provides secretariat support to the Council.

Previous statements can be found online on the Department's website:

www.education.vic.gov.au/spfac.aspx

MARCH 2021 MEETING

The March meeting was attended by the following appointed members or their delegate:

- Jenny Atta, Secretary, Department of Education and Training (the Department) (Chair and representative for the Department)
- Jim Miles, Executive Director, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV)
- Michelle Green, Chief Executive, Independent Schools Victoria (ISV)
- Professor Kwong Lee Dow, Independent Member (representing the interests of students in all Victorian schools)
- Dr David Howes, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education and Training (representing the government school sector).



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Contact the Department if you need this information in an accessible format. Please telephone (03) 7022 2820 or email sp.fac@education.vic.gov.au.

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Secretary
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Mr Jim Miles
Executive Director
Catholic Education
Commission of Victoria

Ms Michelle Green
Chief Executive
Independent Schools
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Prof. Kwong Lee Dow
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