



**Australian Education Union
Submission**

to the

**House Standing Committee on Social Policy
and Legal Affairs**

Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence

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Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs for the inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence. The AEU submission will address the following Terms of Reference:

- a) Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality.
- c) The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, nongovernment and community organisations, and business.

With respect to the remaining Terms of Reference of the inquiry, the AEU supports the submissions made by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the New South Wales Teachers Federation and Our Watch, the national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia.

The AEU would like to draw specific attention to whole-of-population primary prevention initiatives within the public education sector and in particular the Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) in schools program.

Public education plays a central role in the physical, emotional, social and cognitive development of young people to provide the knowledge and skills required to develop and maintain non-violent, respectful and equitable relationships. School-based approaches that help young people identify inappropriate sexual or violent behaviour, and shape their expectations and capacity to build and sustain respectful relationships, are promising examples of primary prevention that appear to be working internationally¹.

Schools are well placed to support primary prevention initiatives to reduce violence against women and their children because they act as hubs in the community both as education institutions and workplaces engaging millions of people across all levels of society.

¹A. Harvey, C. Garcia-Moreno and A. Butchart, *Background Paper WHO Expert Meeting: Primary prevention of intimate-partner violence and sexual violence* (2007)

The AEU represents more than 194,000 members employed in public early childhood education, primary, secondary and special schools, as teachers, educational leaders, education assistants or support staff across Australia. The gender composition of the public education sector is approximately 77% women². As such the implementation of an evidence-based whole school approach to RRE as a primary prevention method to reduce violence against women and their children is of primary concern to the union.

The AEU's submission will outline the current deficiencies in the delivery of RRE in Australia. Further the submission will highlight the Victorian model as a successful case study to demonstrate effective implementation for delivery of RRE.

Background

In May 2008 the government established an 11-member National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children tasked with the role of drafting a national plan. The National Council's report *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009-2021* was released on 29 April 2009. The report contained 11 recommendations, including that the government refer the plan to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG); and request that COAG develop an 'integrated, comprehensive response endorsed by all levels of government by early 2010'. The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan) was subsequently developed in partnership with all states and territories and endorsed and released by COAG in February 2011. The National Plan sets out a framework to address two types of violence where women are more likely to be victims; domestic and family violence, and sexual assault³.

The National Plan identifies outcomes that will be delivered through four three-year action plans as described below⁴:

- First Action Plan (2010-13) – Building a Strong Foundation
 - Focused on building an evidence base and establishing frameworks to achieve attitudinal and behavioural change.
- Second Action Plan (2013-16) – Moving Ahead
 - Focused on consolidating the evidence base and strengthening existing strategies.
- Third Action Plan (2016-19) – Promising Results
 - Intended to deliver results from the long term initiatives implemented during the first two Action Plans.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 51a: In-school Staff (FTE) by School Level, Function, Sex, Affiliation, States and Territories, 2006-2019

³ Australian National Audit Office, *Coordinating and Targeting of Domestic Violence Funding and Actions* (2019)

⁴ Council of Australian Governments, *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children 2010-2022*

- Fourth Action Plan (2019-2022) – Turning the Corner
 - The current Action Plan, an expectation to see tangible results in terms of reduced prevalence of domestic violence reduced proportions of children witnessing violence, and an increased proportion of women who feel safe in their communities.

Each Action Plan identified priority areas for all governments to focus on over each three-year period and practical actions designed to drive national improvements. Primary prevention initiatives are key to the reduction of violence against women and their children and include building primary prevention capacity, driving whole of community action to prevent violence and prevention and early intervention activities.

The National Plan sets out six National Outcomes for all governments to deliver during the twelve years:

- 1) Communities are safe and free from violence.
- 2) Relationships are respectful.
- 3) Indigenous communities are strengthened.
- 4) Services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence.
- 5) Justice responses are effective.
- 6) Perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.

The education system in Australia plays an important role in building primary prevention capacity, driving whole of community action to prevent violence and is key to prevention and early intervention. This is specifically detailed in ‘National Outcomes 2 – Relationships are respectful’ which identifies the strategy and key actions of all Australian governments and the immediate national initiative required to achieve the National Outcome as below:

Strategy	Key Actions	Immediate national initiatives
Build on young people’s capacity to develop respectful relationships	Embed evidence-based best practice respectful relationships education in schools.	Work through the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority to support the inclusion of respectful relationships education in phase three of the Australian Curriculum.
	Foster whole-of-school approaches to respectful relationships involving staff, parents, students and community agencies.	Continue to implement and evaluate the national respectful relationships program.

The success of National Outcome 2 will be measured by *improved knowledge of, and the skills and behaviour for, respectful relationships by young people*⁵.

⁵ Council of Australian Governments, *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*

Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) was embedded in the Australian Curriculum in 2015 through the Health and Physical Education learning area and seven General Capabilities relevant to RRE. However, there is a variation in the extent to which RRE has been embedded in school age education programs across state and territory jurisdictions⁶. A range of RRE programs are currently being delivered by government and several service providers across Australia, many of which are ad hoc in nature. The evaluation into the Second Action Plan of the National Plan states:

“A number of stakeholders raised concerns about the ad hoc nature of the implementation of respectful relationships education programs across a range of service providers. There was also feedback that these programs were not always being delivered to the highest quality or in an audience tailored way. The evaluation also heard anecdotal evidence that inexperienced counsellors were running the programs in some instances. Stakeholders considered that counsellors were not always prepared for the trauma associated with discussing issues such as domestic and family violence and sexual assault and were not adequately equipped to support young people who reported issues at home. Other stakeholders were concerned that having teachers implementing the program could be an issue if they did not have the appropriate training”.

Respectful Relationships Education

The aim of RRE in schools is to develop an evidence-based, comprehensive whole school approach with the following objectives⁷:

- Build a partnership approach between the Commonwealth and state/territory Departments for Education and Training, community organisations, local governments, preschool, primary and secondary schools to increase the provision of primary prevention of gender-based violence activities in schools.
- Provide training and support to increase capacity of schools to develop and implement a whole school approach to RRE.
- Provide training and support to teaching staff to enable the effective delivery of RRE curriculum in the context of a whole school approach.
- Build school and community leadership and embed a culture of RRE in schools.
- Create linkages with, support and strengthen existing efforts within schools to respond to students and teachers experiencing violence, and intervene early to provide support and referrals.

An evidence-based whole school approach with maximum efficacy for the implementation of RRE goes beyond what is delivered in the classroom. A whole school approach means addressing the curriculum across all subjects or learning areas, school policy and practice, school culture and ethos, the working conditions and culture experienced by staff and the relationships modelled to students by their school community including staff, parents and community groups⁸.

⁶ Department of Social Services, *Evaluation of the Second Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children 2010-2022* (2017)

⁷ Our Watch, *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: The Beginnings of Change – Final Evaluation Report* (2016)

⁸ Our Watch, *Evidence Paper: Respectful Relationships Education in Schools* (2015)

A comprehensive whole school approach takes into account the following six domains:

1. School leadership and commitment.
2. Professional learning strategy.
3. Teaching and learning.
4. Community partnerships.
5. Support for staff and students.
6. School culture and environment.

The Our Watch evidence paper for ‘Respectful Relationships in Schools’ identifies the following ‘core elements’ for an effective approach to RRE:

- Address drivers of gender-based violence.
- Have a long term vision, approach and funding.
- Take a whole school approach.
- Establish mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort.
- Ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement.
- Provide resources and support for teachers.
- Use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum.

Respectful Relationships Education in Schools across Australian Jurisdictions

The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to RRE policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments is characterised by a piecemeal approach taken over a long period of time. Common barriers to the effective implementation of a whole of school RRE program in accordance with the objectives set out in the National Plan, observable across every state and territory in Australia (with exception of Victoria) include:

- Diverse approach to delivery.
- Low level of funding commitment, focus and investment in a whole of school RRE in school program.
 - Lack of teaching and learning support materials.
 - Insufficient professional learning provided to teachers to develop confidence and expertise in delivery.
 - Absence of resources to support disclosures.
- Limited mandate to the delivery of respectful relationships education content that specifically addresses the drivers of violence against women and their children.
- No support for evaluation.

In Western Australian the state government committed \$1 million over four years toward the Respectful Relationship Teaching Support Program. The program supports school staff to teach students about healthy and positive relationships in the context of family and domestic violence prevention, and the implementation of a whole of school approach to violence prevention. The program provides professional learning (in the form of e-Learning modules and two face-to-face workshops six months apart) to support teachers deliver respectful relationships education in addition to online resources and a phone service to provide ongoing support.

The staged roll out of the program, which supports respectful relationships content in the Health and Physical Education learning area of the Western Australian Curriculum, includes 10 schools (six primary and four secondary) in phase one with an expansion to 40-50 schools in phase two. However the RRE program is currently only being run in approximately 11 primary schools and 7 high schools across the state.

In South Australia, in response to the Australian Government Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2013, the state government released the 'Safe and Well: Supporting families, protecting children' whole of government strategy. This includes the Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum mandated in all Department for Education sites for children and young people from age 3 to year 12. The curriculum includes one full day training (required to be completed prior to implementation) by teachers, online resources and sits within the Early Years Learning Framework and Health and Physical Education learning area. The state government committed \$3million toward an intensive pilot program run by Anglicare and \$2.2 million towards an Aboriginal intensive family support pilot program.

While the program is mandated across all Department for Education sites, incorporates relationships education and does include whole site implementation planning, it does not deliver respectful relationships education in the context of addressing the drivers of gender-based violence (with exception of minimal units included in the Year 11 and 12 senior curriculum), a core element of evidence-based delivery for RRE.

In the Northern Territory (NT) respectful relationships education is included in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) which combines resources from the Victorian Department of Education and Training 'Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships' learning materials and NT SEL Supplementary Resources. There is no mandated expectation for schools to adopt NT SEL and minimal dedicated support for the delivery of a RRE program including limited intensive professional learning programs for teachers delivering the curriculum or ongoing support to respond to disclosures and violence-related trauma. There is also a distinct lack of consideration to implement this curriculum using a whole school approach to deliver cultural change across the entire school culture or a focus on addressing the drivers of gender-based violence.

The Tasmanian Government launched a Respectful Relationships Education package in 2017 in response to their Safe Homes, Safe Families Action Plan. The package is a comprehensive online resource identifying strategies, processes and skills to guide schools in the explicit teaching of respectful relationships. RRE in Tasmania was implemented across all Tasmanian Government schools in 2018 and aligns with the Australian Health and Physical Education Curriculum. It includes whole-school audit and planning and staff engaging with online professional learning. The RRE package is only deficient by a shortfall in face-to-face professional learning for teachers and external professional support to assist with disclosures and violence-related trauma (outside mandatory reporting requirements covered in the ‘Respectful Relationships Teaching and Learning Package’).

In New South Wales child protection and RRE are required to be taught in every stage of learning from Kindergarten to Year 10 through the Health and Physical Education learning area as part of Personal Development. Mandatory curriculum content is delivered for Year 11 and/or 12 students through the Life Ready course. Life Ready is a 25 hour (minimum) school based program designed, delivered and evaluated by the following seven principles:

- planned and delivered as part of a whole-school approach to student health and wellbeing;
- builds on student knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills across Year 11 and 12;
- partnerships with parents, carers and community will maximise the positive outcomes;
- staff involved in the delivery of Life Ready should have demonstrated expertise in the course content, skills in engaging and interacting with young people and a commitment to the intended outcomes of the course;
- teaching and learning activities using interactive approaches will maximise student learning outcomes;
- shock tactics and fear should not be used; and
- in consultation with students, so that the program reflects local needs.

Professional learning includes a thirty minute online recording for senior executives and two hour online module for teachers. Schools have flexibility in models of delivery including through timetabled lessons, seminar programs or camps.

The RRE program in NSW provides only limited support for teachers to confidently deliver the curriculum, no face-to-face professional learning or external professional support to assist with disclosures and violence-related trauma.

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) addresses RRE through various methods including the Positive Behaviour for Learning Framework, Safe and Supportive Schools Policy, Domestic and Family Violence support and Social and Emotional Learning curriculum. Through these channels the ACT currently provide RRE by:

- reinforcing concepts and messaging about respect, equality and kindness (and similar) through their school mottos and related activities;
- using behavioural approaches that explicitly teach positive behaviour and respect for others, for example Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL);
- delivering *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs* in line with the Directorate’s *Safe and Supportive Schools Policy* (2016);

- using programs such as KidsMatter or Mindmatters that embed values such as respect into school routines, assisting to develop a whole school approach;
- using restorative approaches and strategies that facilitate students to develop skills such as problem solving and empathy, for example Circle Time;
- using Pastoral Care programs to focus on social and emotional learning; and
- providing Mandatory Reporting Training for school staff which includes a specific module on family and domestic violence to provide the skills for staff to recognise and respond to students and other members of the school community affected by family and domestic violence (including sexual assault).

In 2015, the ACT Education and Training Directorate provided grant funding of \$2,500 per year per school. The funding is for schools to improve students' social and emotional learning, including building respectful relationships as part of primary prevention. This funding was also made available in 2016–17.

The ACT is going a long way to implement an evidence-based whole school approach to RRE. Minor gaps include ongoing intensive resourcing with a long term vision for funding to ensure quality, professional learning support for teachers to have the confidence and expertise in the delivery of RRE and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of RRE programs.

In 2017/18 Queensland (QLD) participated in the Our Watch Respectful Relationships in Primary Schools pilot program. The program was funded until June 2019 and included ten schools from South East QLD who self-identified through the program's EOI process. The program focused predominately on Year 1 and 2 engaging 348 staff and 2,213 students. The program adopted a whole school focus including whole school briefings, surveys and activities as well as professional development across whole school and two full days of professional development for teachers delivering the curriculum.

The QLD Government has developed the RRE program for Prep to Year 12 students. The rollout commenced in 2016 and is available to all QLD schools. The development of the RRE Program is in direct response to recommendations 24 to 28 of the Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an End to Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland Report and part of the broader multi-departmental Queensland Government approach to ending domestic and family violence.

Specialised teaching resources are available online to Queensland state schools via the Learning Place and for non-state schools via Scootle (the National Digital Learning Resources Network managed by Education Services Australia). Resources for parents are also available to support learning at home.

Since the initial pilot program, and despite the RRE program being available to all schools there has been no funding allocated to the implementation and few schools are currently running the program. The QLD government has recognised the shortfalls in the implementation of RRE and has put together a Respectful Relationships Education Advisory Group to provide advice and guidance on best practice approaches to embed RRE in Queensland state schools.

Respectful Relationships Education in the Victorian Context

Evidence-based delivery of primary prevention respectful relationships education in Australia occurs in the Victorian setting. In 2015 Victoria established Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Commission included 800 community conversations, 25 days of public hearings, and nearly 1,000 written submissions. The Commission made 227 recommendations to reduce the impact of family violence in the community. One of those recommendations is to mandate the introduction of respectful relationships education into every Victorian Government school by 31st March 2021.

Victoria is effectively implementing evidence –based RRE through the following core elements:

Address drivers of gender-based violence

RRE is a core component of the Victorian Curriculum through the Health and Physical Education and Personal and Social Capability curriculum areas. All Victorian government and Catholic schools deliver the Victorian Curriculum. Schools are supported to deliver the curriculum through the optional Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning resources. The Victorian Government intends to mandate the implementation of RRE into every government school in Victoria from prep to year 12 by March 2021.

More than 1,450 Victorian schools have signed on to drive change within their school community by implementing the respectful relationships whole-school approach, as recommended by the Royal Commission into Family Violence⁹.

In 2020 the Victorian Government enacted the Gender Equality Act to improve workplace gender equality across the Victorian public sector (including public preschools, primary and secondary schools). Under the Act, organisations are required to consider and promote gender equality in the community, through the development of Gender Equality Action Plans (every four years), gender equity strategies and public progress reporting every two years¹⁰. This intervention will support and intersect primary prevention activities such as the whole school RRE program and directly address the drivers of gender-based violence.

Have a long term vision, approach and funding

The 2018/19 Victorian State Budget invested \$22.8 million to continue the respectful relationships initiative for 2 years as well as an additional \$645,500 to support Partners in Prevention (PiP) for another year commencing from July 2019. Funding will support participants with training, resources, networking and learning opportunities and support the expansion of the network to include primary prevention practitioners working in other settings.

⁹ <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-recommendations/mandate-introduction-respectful-relationships-education-every>

¹⁰ <https://www.vic.gov.au/gender-equality-bill>

The Department of Education and Training will support Victorian schools and early childhood settings to implement respectful relationships through funding:

- a Leading School and Partner School initiative, providing intensive training and support to Victorian government, Catholic and Independent schools to implement the whole-school approach to RRE.

Under the initiative, lead schools will receive funding for two years while the partner school will receive funding for one year¹¹. The funding allocations for 2020 are:

- Lead schools: \$10,000.
- Partner schools: \$4,000 per campus¹².

Take a whole school approach

A whole-school approach to RRE recognises that schools are:

- a workplace where all staff should feel equally respected, safe and valued and have equal opportunities;
- a safe space where young people can learn about gender equality and respectful relationships, in and out of the classroom; and
- part of the wider community that can model gender equality and respectful relationships.

A resource kit for schools has been developed to provide schools with strategies and tools to support the implementation of the whole-school approach. The resources have been developed by experts from Deakin University and the University of Melbourne and support a whole of school approach to creating equal and respectful attitudes, behaviours, structures and practices across the school culture and ethos¹³.

Establish mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort

A dedicated RRE workforce is in place to support lead and partner schools with implementation, including:

- RRE project leads in each of the state's 17 local areas to support lead schools to fulfil their roles and helping to build the capacity of all participating schools to implement the initiative.
- RRE liaison officers in each of the state's 17 local areas to support schools to respond to family violence, providing advice about evidence based approaches and interventions, liaising with specialist services and embedding effective response and referral processes.
- A RRE unit in the Department's central office manage the state-wide supports and tools available to for Victorian schools to successfully implement respectful relationships.

¹¹<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/capabilities/personal/Pages/respectfulrelschoools.aspx#link23>

¹²<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/finance/Pages/srpref086.aspx>

¹³<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/capabilities/personal/Pages/respectfulrel.aspx>

The Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority has specialist curriculum consultants to assist schools with delivering social and emotional learning topics including the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials¹⁴.

The PiP is a network of more than 1,400 professionals who promote RRE in schools and early childhood settings across the state and strengthen referral and response to family violence. Allocated funding will support members with training, resources, networking and learning opportunities and support the expansion of the network to include primary prevention practitioners working in other settings.

Ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement

The RRE in schools project was piloted in 2014-15 as a whole-school approach to RRE, encompassing classroom learning materials, through to cultural changes in the staffroom and broader school ethos. The pilot program was trialed with 19 schools reaching 1700 teachers and 4000 school students.

The pilot program and its evaluation was conducted in partnership by the Victorian Government and Our Watch, a national organisation that advocates for the prevention of violence against women and their children. This pilot project is one of the first evaluations in Australia examining what works in schools to affect change and promote gender equality, and directly builds on previous education programs in this area that were also pioneered in Victoria¹⁵.

Provide resources and support for teachers and use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum

Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships is a suite of teaching and learning materials for Foundation to year 12. The resources have been developed by experts and support age-appropriate curriculum delivery and include lesson plans and activities that help students learn and practice social skills and apply them in a positive way to learning, life and relationships.

The materials cover eight social and emotional learning topics to support the delivery of RRE content through the Victorian curriculum¹⁶.

A range of professional learning opportunities, delivered at the local area level and tailored for school staff and school leaders supports them to: implement a whole school approach, respond to disclosures of family violence and deliver RRE as part of the curriculum¹⁷.

¹⁴<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/capabilities/personal/Pages/respectfulrel.aspx#link23>

¹⁵<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/capabilities/personal/Pages/respectfulrelapproach.aspx#link101>

¹⁶<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/capabilities/personal/Pages/respectfulrel.aspx>

¹⁷<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/capabilities/personal/Pages/respectfulrelschools.aspx#link23>

The respectful relationships initiative also includes professional learning that will strengthen the capacity of up to 6,000 early childhood educators in Victorian Government funded kindergarten programs to promote respectful relationships, positive attitudes and behaviours within their integrated teaching approach to enable children to build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence.

Conclusion

It is clear that there is great disparity in the design of approaches, the methods of delivery and their subsequent impacts of RRE across the different jurisdictions in Australia. Poor approaches include those that are:

- Well-intentioned but do not yield results.
- Well-designed but poorly implemented.
- Poorly constructed and/or
- Insufficiently funded for implementation or evaluation.

Fortunately all states and territories have implemented some form of RRE program in schools. There is a significant opportunity to build on existing work, close gaps in current system design and implementation and learn from the success of the Victorian RRE model. The challenge now is to ensure sustainable effective whole school implementation, fully funded over the term of the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children. According to Our Watch, violence against women costs Australia \$21.7 billion annually the majority of which is borne by victims. Governments in Australia spend \$7.8 billion a year in health, administration and social welfare costs as a consequence of violence against women¹⁸.

The largest gaps to implementation include resources to support staff with the delivery of a whole of school approach. The next national plan must identify key strategies and actions to rectify the current deficiencies in this area such as:

- Providing age-appropriate curriculum guidance for all year levels with time to prepare and deliver the curriculum;
- Ensuring all teachers receive accredited, face-to-face professional learning to support the delivery of curriculum (professional learning strategy);
- Providing student and staff disclosure support;
- Ongoing support for teachers and schools to respond effectively to disclosures;
- Supporting collaboration with parents/carers to engage with RRE;
- Coordinating violence prevention and women's organisations to support schools and teachers in primary prevention of gender-based violence and to promote gender equality;
- Reinforcing messaging through collaborative community partnerships with local government, sporting clubs, local workplaces and other community organisations;

¹⁸ Our Watch, *Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit* (2015)

- Gathering evidence from the school community to evaluate and monitor the impacts of RRE and tailor programs to the individual needs of the school;
- Ensuring all RRE programs address the drivers of violence against women; and
- Ensuring all RRE programs take a whole school approach including school gender equality assessment, gender equality policy and promoting gender equality in curriculum planning.