



# Anti-racism education

## Advice for schools



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The NSW Department of Education acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of Australia and pays respect to Aboriginal Elders past and present.



# 1. Understanding racism

## 1.1 What is racism?

The Human Rights Commission defines racism as follows:

Racism can take many forms, such as jokes or comments that cause offence or hurt, sometimes unintentionally; name-calling or verbal abuse; harassment or intimidation, or commentary in the media or online that inflames hostility towards certain groups.

At its most serious, racism can result in acts of physical abuse and violence.

Racism can directly or indirectly exclude people from accessing services or participating in employment, education, sport and social activities.

It can also occur at a systemic or institutional level through policies, conditions or practices that disadvantage certain groups.

It often manifests through unconscious bias or prejudice.

On a structural level, racism serves to perpetuate inequalities in access to power, resources and opportunities across racial and ethnic groups.

The belief that a particular race or ethnicity is inferior or superior to others is sometimes used to justify such inequalities.

— Australian Human Rights Commission, National Anti-Racism Strategy, July 2012, Page 4

Racist attitudes and beliefs are misconceptions about people based on perceived racial lines and are often founded on the fear of difference, including differences in customs, values, religion, physical appearance and ways of living and viewing the world. This includes negative

attitudes towards the use of different languages, 'foreign' accents or the use of non-standard variations of a dominant community language.

These attitudes and beliefs find expression in racist behaviours, both in the actions of individuals and in the policies and entrenched practices of institutions. Where these behaviours involve unequal power relationships between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds, racist actions on the part of members of the dominant culture have the effect of marginalising those from minority groups.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 Racism in Australia

Research highlights that understanding the impacts of racism, including the understanding and recognition of its effects and historical origins, is critical in developing effective anti-racism interventions. The impacts of racism in Australia felt by generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as by settlers, migrants, refugees and their descendants has been well documented.



Until relatively recently, racist policies and practices were embedded in Australian laws and institutions, most noticeably in the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and in the restriction of immigration of non-European people under the White Australia Policy. The Racial Discrimination Act came into force on 31 October 1975 with the purpose of protecting people against prejudice.<sup>2</sup> In 2011 the Australian Government committed to develop a National Anti-

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<sup>1</sup> Dunn et al, Challenging Racism: the anti-racism research project (2012)  
Viewed at: [http://www.uws.edu.au/social\\_sciences/soss/research/challenging\\_racism](http://www.uws.edu.au/social_sciences/soss/research/challenging_racism)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, (2015) Perspectives on the Racial Discrimination Act: Papers from the 40 years of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) Conference (page 8)

Racism Strategy for Australia with the aim “to promote a clear understanding of what racism is, and how it can be prevented and reduced.”<sup>3</sup>

Australians have become increasingly aware of the damage that racism has caused and is still causing both to those who have suffered from racism and to society as a whole. Consultations conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission found that nine out of ten respondents said that racism was either an extremely important or very important issue facing Australia as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Increased acceptance of the culturally and linguistically diverse character of our society has challenged previous policies of segregation, exclusion and assimilation – key elements in the historical development of racism in Australian society. However, manifestations of racism continue in contemporary Australian society in attitudes and stereotypes as well as in overt forms in our community. Current global conflicts have evoked extremist views which have challenged programs designed to promote diversity and social cohesion.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.3 Breaking the cycle of racism

Recognition of racism and its intent and impact is an essential part of any anti-racism education strategy. Silence and denial are identified in anti-racism research as two major impediments to countering racism in Australian society. Silence and denial are fundamental to the continuing existence of racism. People who are subjected to racial discrimination and intimidation have often been silent about what has happened. Many have come to believe that racism is inevitable or at least unavoidable. Those who practise racism have been inclined to deny its existence or not to recognise or admit to their own racist behaviours. The situation is exacerbated when the racist behaviours have gone unchallenged, as a result of complaints being ignored, diverted or denied.<sup>6</sup>

The result is that the effects of racism remain hidden, misunderstood or ignored. It is in this way that racism can become so pervasive that it seems acceptable and normal.

Breaking the cycle of silence and denial is an important first step in eliminating racism and building confidence amongst the school community.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2012) National Anti-Racism Strategy  
Viewed at: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/National%20Anti-Racism%20Strategy.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2012), National Anti-Racism Strategy: Consultation Report, July 2012.  
Viewed at: <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/campaign/consultations>

<sup>5</sup> Scanlon Foundation, Mapping Social Cohesion (2014). Viewed at: <http://monash.edu/mapping-population/social-cohesion-report.html>

<sup>6</sup> Innes, G, National Press Club Speech, I'm not racist but...Zero tolerance or zero acknowledgement? (2011)  
Viewed at: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/i-m-not-racist-national-press-club-speech>

## 1.4 Effects of racism

Racism has damaging effects on individuals, families and communities and the learning and working environment. Racism can adversely affect:

- educational outcomes
- individual happiness and self-confidence
- school climate
- cultural identity
- school and community relations
- student behaviour.

Racism can generate tensions within school communities which, if unaddressed, impacts on the educational experiences of all students. It can undermine students' self-confidence and can result in students exhibiting a range of negative behaviours. Students who are disaffected with school are less likely to attend school regularly and are more likely to drop out of school earlier than other groups of students. Racism has been linked to diminished morale, lower productivity and an increase in the incidence of stress and absenteeism.

Together, the lower participation rates, behavioural problems and feelings of alienation that result from the presence of racism in schools impact on educational outcomes. Educational success depends on the regular sustained attendance of each student and their ability to participate effectively in the classroom. When racism exists in a learning environment, this balance is disrupted and educational outcomes may be limited as a result. Educational outcomes for individual students and student groups who are subject to racism may include lower levels of educational achievement and lower rates of participation in post-school education and training.

## 1.5 Indicators of racism in schools

Recognising racism in schools may be difficult, as racism manifests itself in a range of ways, some more clearly discernible than others. Some indicators of racism include the following:

- hostility or lack of co-operation between groups
- appearance of racist graffiti
- promotion of racist propaganda
- display of racist behaviour including comments, ridicule or abuse, cyber-racism as well as physical harassment and assault
- existence of discriminatory practices including:
  - low expectations for some groups of students
  - non-inclusive policies, curriculum and pedagogy denying certain groups access to a wide curriculum.



## 2. Countering racism

To effectively counter racism, anti-racism education strategies need to be implemented across the full range of a school's activities. Under the Department's Anti-Racism Policy, principals are responsible for including anti-racism education strategies in their school plans and reporting on their implementation in Annual School Reports. Under the Policy, the nomination and training of an Anti-Racism Contact Officer, is also the responsibility of the principal.

### 2.1 Anti-Racism Contact Officer (ARCO)

All schools are required to have a trained Anti-Racism Contact Officer (ARCO). This officer assists parents, staff and students who have complaints regarding racism and facilitates the complaints handling process.

#### Nominating an ARCO

The principal is required to nominate a member of the teaching staff to be the school's ARCO. The ARCO should be an experienced teacher who:

- has good communication and mediation skills
- is trusted by parents, teachers and students
- does not have an advocacy role in the school
- is willing to further develop their understanding of racism
- is a full-time experienced member of staff.

The cultural background of an ARCO should not be used as a criterion for selection. ARCOs are not advocates for students, parents and community members but impartial facilitators in the complaints handling process.

In larger schools, in order to ease the potential load, the principal may wish to nominate several staff to fulfil the role of the ARCO.

The ARCO should be promoted within the school community.

## The role of the ARCO

The ARCO role has three major aspects.

### 1. Complaints support role

Complaints of racism may be made to any member of staff including the ARCO.

If a complaint of racism is made to the school principal, executive member or any other member of staff, the complainant is encouraged to discuss the matter with the ARCO, or advised that the ARCO can assist.

The ARCO supports the handling of complaints of racism in a number of ways by:

- managing complaints of racism made by students against other students in accordance with the [Behaviour Code for Students](#) and the school's discipline and wellbeing procedures
- referring complaints of racism made by staff and community members to appropriate executive staff members
- providing advice on the complaints handling process to students, staff and community members
- supporting the complainant during the complaints handling process
- providing advice to the principal and/or nominated complaints manager.

All complaints of racism are managed by the ARCO according to the [Complaints Handling Policy](#) and procedures. On receiving a complaint the ARCO, in certain circumstances, may attempt to negotiate a resolution. This is only when the complaint does not involve a staff member or members of the community.

For complaints of racism involving staff members or members of the community, the ARCO provides advice to the complainant on the complaints handling procedures and supports the complainant in the process. The ARCO may be asked to assist in seeking a resolution using the appropriate procedure but it is not the ARCO's role to lead the process. The principal will nominate a complaints manager to lead the process for resolving the complaint.

### 2. Educational role

The ARCO assists the principal to:



- ensure the school community knows who the ARCO is and what the ARCO role involves. [Posters](#) promoting awareness of the role of the ARCO are available on the Department's website.
- promote anti-racism education in the school
- develop anti-racism education strategies in school planning
- ensure that staff are aware of relevant policies including the [Anti-Racism Policy](#); the [Multicultural Education Policy](#); the [Aboriginal Education and Training Policy](#); the [Complaints Handling Policy](#) and complaints procedures as they relate to complaints about racism the [NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated Partnership Agreement](#) and [The Wellbeing Framework for Schools](#).

### 3. Monitoring role

The ARCO assists the principal to:

- maintain records of complaints and allegations concerning racism
- decide what data regarding complaints about racism should be collected
- identify significant statistical trends in relation to complaints about racism
- implement actions arising from complaints of racism.

### ARCO training

Principals are responsible for ensuring that newly nominated ARCOs undertake ARCO training. ARCO training is coordinated by each School Services team. Completing the Anti-Racism Contact Officer blended online training course will contribute to 10 hours of QTC registered PD towards maintaining Proficient Teacher Accreditation in NSW. The training is usually delivered by experienced ARCOs who have been trained as ARCO Tutors.

The training covers three areas:

- understanding racism
- role of the ARCO and using the complaints handling procedures
- skills development for ARCOs.

Complaints managers nominated to handle complaints of racism also need to complete ARCO training so that they understand the ARCO role and are confident in dealing with complaints of racism.

Until a newly appointed ARCO receives training, the principal will need to provide support and advice regarding the ARCO's role and responsibilities. Section 3 of this Advice for schools document provides links to useful anti-racism resources to assist principals, complaints managers and ARCOs.

It is important that ARCOs receive on-going executive support in undertaking their role. It is recommended that ARCOs refresh their training every 4 years.

School Services teams are encouraged to maintain ARCO networks to support on-going professional learning for ARCOs.

## 2.2 Complaints of racism

A student, a parent, a staff member, or any member of the school or the community can make a complaint about racism. Complaints about racism are dealt with using the Department's Complaints Handling Policy; [School Community and Consumer Complaint Procedure](#) and the [Staff Complaint Procedure](#). Data relating to complaints of racism, and the methods used to resolve them, should be maintained, in line with these procedures.

Complaints of racism can be made to any staff member, but are best facilitated by the ARCO who has been appropriately trained.

### Receiving a complaint

Complaints of racism should be referred to the ARCO or the principal as soon as is practicable. If the complaint has been referred to the principal or other executive member of staff, it is important that they inform the ARCO who assists in maintaining records of complaints of racism.

If the matter has been initially referred to the ARCO, they will speak with the complainant and assess if it is appropriate to seek a resolution, consistent with the [Complaints Handling Policy](#).

An informal resolution may be sought depending on the seriousness of the complaint and whether or not the complainant is fearful of, or intimidated by the respondent. If an informal resolution is not appropriate or possible, the ARCO may assist the complainant to put the complaint in writing if necessary and inform the complainant of the relevant procedure and their rights.

The ARCO will then refer the matter to the complaints manager who is usually nominated by the principal.

The principal or the complaints manager may wish to seek the assistance of the ARCO in seeking resolution. It is not the role of the ARCO to lead any negotiation that seeks a formal resolution or to make decisions regarding complaints.

### The complaints manager's role

The principal is responsible for ensuring that the [Anti-Racism Policy](#) is implemented in the school and that complaints regarding racism are dealt with in accordance with the [Complaints Handling Policy](#).

The complaints manager is usually the principal or an executive member of staff nominated by the principal to manage, approve or conduct formal action such as negotiation or investigation. Principals should ensure that training is provided to executive members of staff who act as complaints managers in dealing with complaints regarding racism. Principals can provide this training within the school or contact School Services teams for assistance.

For school community and consumer complaints of racism, a [Complaint Managers' Tool Kit](#) provides resources to assist the complaints manager resolve complaints.

For staff complaints of racism, a Complaint Managers' Toolkit – [Staff Complaints Tools](#) provides resources for the complaints manager to assist resolve complaints.

## Advertising complaints procedures

Principals and managers need to ensure all members of the school community are familiar with the [Complaints Handling Policy](#). Information about the procedures should be included in at least one school newsletter each year. Schools can use the following wording:

If at any time you find that you have a concern about our school, you are encouraged to come to the school and tell a member of staff so that your concern can be resolved. With your support, we do the very best we can to ensure productive, safe and enjoyable learning experiences for all our students. Should you feel that you must raise a concern formally, the NSW Department of Education has procedures for ensuring that complaints are handled fairly. Information about how to lodge a complaint is available in the school office or in the case of complaints relating to racism you can contact the school Anti-Racism Contact Officer (ARCO) who is XXXX. Further information is also available in the Department's [Complaints Handling Policy](#) procedures.

It is important that all members of the school community know who the ARCO is, what they do and how to access their assistance. Information for parents about making a complaint and a Complaints and Compliments form have been translated into 35 languages and are available at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/going-to-a-public-school/translated-documents/anti-racism-contact-officer>

Newsletters, parent and student meetings, assemblies, posters and social media may be used to raise awareness about the role of the school ARCO.



These posters can be downloaded from: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/curriculum/multicultural-education/anti-racism-education/professional-learning-and-resources>.

## 2.3 School-based strategies

As well as the nomination and training of an ARCO, the [Anti-Racism Policy](#) also requires schools to implement strategies that lead to timely appropriate responses to expressions of:

- direct racism, such as incidents of racial abuse, harassment and discrimination
- indirect racism, such as lack of recognition of cultural diversity and culturally biased practices. Effective anti-racism education strategies must be developed to confront any race-based generalisations, stereotypes, bias, prejudice and discrimination that are the foundations of direct and indirect racism.

Anti-racism education may involve whole-school strategies or strategies related to teaching and learning in the classroom. Action should be taken in both these areas to effectively counter racism.

Strategies in anti-racism education can involve staff, students or the whole school community. They can be a single activity or a combination of activities implemented to promote change over time across a number of areas.

Effective anti-racism education strategies need to comprehensively address the three dimensions of the [Anti-Racism Policy](#):

- promoting acceptance of and respect for Australia's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity
- challenging prejudiced attitudes
- ensuring that sanctions are applied against racist and discriminatory behaviours.

Schools should choose strategies that are appropriate for their local contexts and needs.

### Planning

Schools should collect data related to incidents of racism in order to determine what kinds of actions and interventions are required. The creation of a local implementation plan will assist schools in documenting their strategies and meeting policy objectives and requirements.

As a first step, schools can look for indicators of racism using an audit tool such as the [Planning and Evaluation Guide](#) available on the [Racism. No way!](#) website.

### School culture, practices and procedures

Schools must have procedures in place that ensure timely and professional responses are made to complaints about racism. For example, schools need to promote the role of the ARCO so parents, staff and students understand that support is available.

Principals are responsible for examining practices and procedures to ensure they do not result in discrimination of any particular group or individual.

Consultation with school community members assists in creating inclusive school procedures and practices and increases community confidence in the school.

Schools should encourage participation of all sections of the school community in the activities of the school. For example, practices used for the nomination and election of members to representative bodies such as the Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) and the Student Representative Council (SRC) should be examined to ensure they allow for inclusion of members of underrepresented groups.

## Professional learning

It is essential that all teaching and non-teaching staff can recognise racism and its effects on the whole school community. They need to understand what they can do about racism and how to support those members of the school community who may be subject to racism. Professional learning opportunities need to be provided for all staff.

Advice regarding the delivery of professional learning, along with a range of professional learning activities and presentations, is available for staff on the [Department's website](#).

## Teaching strategies

In order to challenge race-based generalisations, stereotypes, bias, prejudice and discrimination that are the foundations of direct and indirect racism, teaching programs and practice need to include strategies that promote intercultural understanding and develop respect for Australia's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. All teachers should model respectful behaviour and inclusive practices, carefully manage classroom discussions and student behaviour and explicitly teach about racism and how to deal with it through teaching and learning activities.

For a range of teaching strategies, see <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/> and [RightsEd curriculum resources](#).



## Engaging parents and community

The participation of parents and community in the life of the school is an essential component of anti-racism education. It allows parents to be confident about the safety of their children. It fosters improved community relations within and outside the school and provides an opportunity for collaborative home-school partnerships to be developed in response to local needs.

As a first step in effectively communicating with parents who do not speak English well, schools should use [interpreting services](#) that are available to them. Usually the costs of these services are met by the Department.

A large number of [translated departmental documents](#) are available in up to 35 languages on the Department's website.

Schools must provide information to parents and community members about their rights and responsibilities in relation to racism, including information about the [role of the ARCO](#), which is available in translation, and the availability of complaints handling procedures.

Consulting with parents and community members from minority groups can lead to their increased engagement in the life of the school. Conducting language group specific meetings in the first instance can lead to the identification of useful community resources and skills and the inclusion of minority community membership of representative bodies such as the P&C.

[Opening the School Gate](#) provides teachers and school staff with a range of strategies to support migrant and refugee parents/carers to fully participate in school life. [Strengthening Community Harmony](#) provides advice to schools on how to build and maintain school community harmony and enhance greater social cohesion. [Narragunnawali](#) provides an interactive platform to create a community of positive and engaged schools and early learning services that are committed to promoting reconciliation between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## Student engagement and initiatives

When students learn about historical and political events in the classroom and are exposed to racist incidents in the media, or as they occur in the local community or globally, they are often keen to act and challenge unjust behaviour.

Students should be encouraged to identify and lead anti-racism strategies that engage the interest of other students. For example, students can form anti-racism action teams to coordinate anti-racism initiatives, such as competitions and performances. Actions like these highlight for other students, and across school networks, the importance of anti-racism education.

Schools should make anti-racism resources available to students including:

- learning activities on the [Racism. No way!](#) website
- learning units of work on [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) website
- learning resources on the [All Together Now](#) and [Reconciliation Australia](#) website

Incorporating anti-racism education activities into student wellbeing programs such as peer support and anti-bullying programs assists in building a safe learning environment and reinforces the message that racism will not be tolerated in the school. [The Wellbeing Framework](#) provides enhanced opportunities to create safer school environments and counter inappropriate behaviours, including racism. Strategies for what to do when [younger students](#) encounter racism can also be taught. Peer support programs can also be used to advertise the role of the ARCO and the existence of complaints handling procedures.



## Reporting

Principals are responsible for reporting in their Annual School Report on the anti-racism education strategies implemented and progress in implementing the [Anti-Racism Policy](#). This

reporting should be included in the mandatory section on Multicultural Education and Anti-Racism Education. Schools should collect data on the implementation and effectiveness of anti-racism education strategies to assist in their reporting.

Examples of innovative school-based anti-racism education initiatives are included in the Department's [Multicultural Policies and Services Program Report](#).



### 3. Resources

#### Teaching and learning resources:

- [Australian Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Anti Discrimination Board of NSW](#)
- [Cultural Exchange NSW](#)
- [Multicultural education](#)
- [Racism. No way!](#)
- [Reconciliation Australia](#)

#### Department policies and guidelines:

- [Aboriginal Education Policy](#)
- [Anti-Racism Policy](#)
- [Complaints Handling Policy](#)
- [Multicultural Education Policy](#)
- [NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated Partnership Agreement](#)
- [Opening the School Gate](#)
- [Strengthening Community Harmony](#)





## 4. Principal checklist for anti-racism education

- Executive demonstrate a leadership role in addressing racism
- Staff and school community are aware of the Anti-Racism Policy and procedures - for dealing with racism
- ARCO is nominated
- ARCO is trained
- Nominated complaints manager is trained
- Support is provided to newly appointed ARCO until trained
- Students/staff are aware of the ARCO and their role
- School community is aware of the role of the ARCO
- School community is aware of complaints procedures
- Translated documents are used where appropriate
- Teaching and learning programs are monitored for culturally inclusive content
- Indicators of racism in the school community are identified
- Anti-racism education strategies are included in school planning
- Professional learning for staff on indicators of racism and impact of racism is delivered
- Implementation of anti-racism education strategies reported in Annual School Report
- Ongoing support is provided to the ARCO