

A checklist for schools to assess or develop an equal opportunity (EO) and anti-harassment policy

What is a safe and inclusive school?

In a safe and inclusive school, the whole school community feels welcome, supported and physically and emotionally secure. The diversity of staff, students and their families is acknowledged and incorporated into a responsive curriculum. Human rights and dignity are respected. Every student and staff member of the school is encouraged to achieve their potential.

A safe and inclusive school has:

- A principal and other school leaders who are committed to publicly promoting equal opportunity for the whole school community
- teaching and learning practices that incorporate the diversity of the school community
- processes and systems in place that uphold and communicate these values
- strategies to ensure that all are accountable for maintaining the highest standards of behaviour
- information on how to prevent discrimination, harassment, bullying, vilification or victimization, and where to seek help if these behaviours occur
- mechanisms for complaints to be addressed and resolved in a fair and consistent manner.

No member of the school community will be treated less favourably because of irrelevant personal characteristics, whether actual or assumed, such as age, disability, gender identity, industrial activity, political belief or activity, race, religious belief or activity, sex and sexual orientation. Nor will such characteristics affect access to benefits and services provided by the school.

A safe and inclusive school acknowledges that students, staff and others who are experiencing discrimination most acutely may not complain about their discrimination for many reasons. Therefore, a safe and inclusive school will pro-actively identify and monitor potentially discriminatory and harassing behaviours which may be occurring at school and develop strategies to prevent them occurring.

Why is EO important?

EO is essential to the wellbeing of the whole school community and to create a safe and inclusive school. It is impossible to effectively teach, learn or work in a discriminatory or harassing environment. EO is also a legal requirement under federal and state legislation.

How does EO apply to schools?

In schools, EO applies to education, goods and service provision, employment and sport. EO is the responsibility of the school's governing body and the responsibility of the persons to whom the governing body delegates such responsibility, usually the principal.

How to use the checklist

Take a few minutes to complete the following checklist. This will help you assess how well your school may be meeting its EO responsibilities. You can use the checklist to assess your school's EO policy and identify any additional steps that may be necessary to ensure your school is as safe and inclusive as possible. Alternatively you can use it to develop an appropriate EO policy for your school. A regular review of the EO policy and procedures is recommended.

EO checklist for school principals

Please place a tick beside all of the following statements that apply to your school.

Your school has an EO policy.

This is critical to meeting your legal responsibilities. If you cannot tick this box, you can use this checklist to help you develop a policy that reflects and meets the unique needs of your school community.

Your school is aware of the procedures for resolving EO related issues, problems and complaints.

This is also critical to meeting your legal responsibilities.

The EO Policy is written so that the whole school community can understand it.

The EO Policy is accessible to the whole school community. Consider translations in relevant key languages.

Your school's EO policy includes an introductory statement of support for EO that directly links EO to the school's mission, vision and strategic plan.

Your school's EO policy includes a statement of support for equity and diversity across the whole school community.

Your school's EO policy includes a statement that illustrates key benefits of EO and diversity to the whole school community.

Your school's EO policy states who and what it covers.

Your school's EO policy includes a statement that diversity enriches the school and that irrelevant personal characteristics such as sex, race and disability will not mean less favourable treatment or negatively affect an individual's access to benefits and services provided by the (name) school.

- Your school's EO policy includes a clear statement that discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, vilification, bullying and other unfair, detrimental or inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated at your school under any circumstances.
- Your school's policy includes definitions and examples of the kinds of behaviour that may constitute discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, vilification, victimisation or other inappropriate behaviour in clear terms that everyone in the school community can understand.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement of commitment to create a safe, inclusive and physically and emotionally secure learning and working environment that caters to the needs of the whole school community.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement of the school's commitment to actively prevent discrimination, harassment, bullying, vilification, victimisation or other unacceptable and unlawful behaviour, and to make the school a discrimination and harassment free place.
- Your school's EO policy lists other relevant documents and sources of information.
- Your school's EO policy includes statements of rights, responsibilities and accountability relevant to all members of the school community.
- Your school's EO policy includes guidelines about what to do about an EO issue or complaint.
- Your school's EO policy explains and applies principles of fairness, sensitivity, promptness and confidentiality.
- Your school's EO policy describes the kinds of action that will be taken to resolve issues or complaints.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement that no one who makes an EO complaint in good faith will be victimised or otherwise subjected to any disadvantage or detriment because they made or might make such a complaint.
- Your school's EO policy lists sources of additional information and support.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement committing the school to regularly review the policy and monitor its implementation.

No matter how many items on this list you have ticked, assessing your school's EO implementation is a great beginning.