



# Review to inform a consistent national standard to address bullying in schools

## Terms of Reference

### Context

Bullying and cyber bullying have significant detrimental impacts on student mental health and wellbeing. Bullying undermines student wellbeing, attendance, engagement and learning outcomes. It also contributes to lifelong impacts such as reduced community participation, poor social-economic outcomes, and increases in ill-mental and physical health.

Bullying is not something that happens just in schools, but schools are places where we can identify instances of bullying, intervene, and provide support to children and young people. 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.

Currently, there are 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.

The Australian Government has funded a range of measures to support student mental health and wellbeing and address bullying, including (but not limited to):

- \$307 million for the National Student Wellbeing Program
- \$10.8 million for the voluntary mental health tool My Mind Check
- \$4.2 million in funding for the Australian Schools Anti-Bullying Collective.

The Australian Government also funds the Student Wellbeing Hub, which provides a range of resources on student wellbeing for teachers, students and parents.

In addition, significant work is taking place across schools in all jurisdictions.

Despite this work, students, families and educators frequently report that the available information and resources are overwhelming, inconsistent, and difficult to understand and access; with national data showing that reports of bullying are rising.

To address this issue, the Australian Government will lead the development of an approach to a consistent national standard to address bullying in schools (both prevention and response), informed by a rapid, expert-led review supported by a reference group to advise on education system and policy issues.

## Purpose of this review

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, if they're experiencing bullying, it will be managed in an appropriate way.

This work aligns with Commonwealth legislation that has been introduced to set a minimum age for accessing social media as part of a broader harm minimisation approach to the regulation of online platforms.

## Conduct of the review

This review will be funded by the Australian Government, which will appoint independent experts as review leaders, supported by a reference group to advise on education system and policy issues. The Australian Government will also provide secretariat support for the review.

States and territories and the non-government school sectors will facilitate consultation with key stakeholders, including those in schools. This may include gathering and providing relevant information and providing logistical support for the review.

The review will begin in early 2025 following the appointment of the independent reviewers. It will include in-person engagement, significant online engagement and a written feedback process. In person and online engagement will include engagement across parent groups, school peaks, unions, and government agencies, as well as directly with parents, teachers and young people to ensure their lived experience is considered in the review.

The review will report directly to the Australian Government Minister for Education. The report will then be shared with all Australian Education Ministers.

The Australian Government will ensure the states and territories and the non-government sector are regularly updated on the review through the Australian Education Senior Officials Committee.

## Scope

The Review will provide Education Ministers with:

1. An overview of relevant research and evidence on best practice in relation to preventing and responding to bullying in school contexts – including addressing bullying behaviours and reducing underlying causes.
2. A stocktake of interventions that address bullying that are in place in Australian schools.
3. A desktop review of the effectiveness of different types of interventions to address bullying behaviours and support individuals who have been bullied.
4. Details of possible models for a consistent national standard for responding to bullying and its underlying causes in school contexts.
5. Advice on what a consistent national standard to address bullying should comprise, which may include principles for proactive procedures, data collection, communication, feedback processes and intervention mechanisms and escalation pathways, and other features such as considerations for responding to bullying of specific cohorts such as students with disability.
6. Advice on how the success or otherwise of a consistent national standard could be determined.

## Consultation

The Review will include in-person engagement, significant online engagement and a written feedback process. In person and online engagement will include engagement across parent groups, school peaks, unions, and government agencies, as well as directly with parents, teachers and young people.