

INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL LEADERS



ACT SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS (SAIS) INITIATIVE

WHAT IS THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE?

The ACT Safe and Inclusive Schools (SAIS) Initiative provides assistance to schools to develop and maintain safe, inclusive environments for all students regardless of their gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation.

It enables schools and education programs in the ACT to seek assistance to develop their practice in areas such as supporting individual student need, welcoming and celebrating community and family diversity. The Initiative supports schools to build respectful school cultures where prejudice, discrimination harassment and violence on the basis of gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation is unacceptable.

WE WANT EVERYONE TO BE ABLE TO BE THEMSELVES AT SCHOOL AND TO FEEL SAFE AND WELCOMED AS WHO THEY ARE.

WHY DOES THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE EXIST?

Same sex attracted, intersex and/or gender diverse people are part of every school community. This is the case even when they may not appear visible to everyone. Many students, parents, and educators recognise that school is a place where same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse people often experience exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and even violence.

Education professionals understand that assisting students to have a sense of belonging as part of a safe, supportive and respectful school community, has a positive impact on education participation, attainment, health and wellbeing.

Schools already have legislative, professional and ethical responsibilities to ensure that they provide safe and inclusive environments for students, families and staff. Sometimes schools need support and advice to effectively address young people's needs. Appropriate support and advice through the critical years can help facilitate our children and young people to grow up with the self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of worth necessary to lead happy and fulfilling lives.

THE INITIATIVE OFFERS SUPPORT AND ADVICE TO SCHOOL STAFF TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN SAFE, INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF THEIR GENDER PRESENTATION/IDENTITY, INTERSEX STATUS OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

HOW HAS THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE BEEN DEVELOPED?

The SAIS Initiative has been designed to respond to the specific educational, legal and community contexts that exist in the ACT, with input from schools, parent groups and other education and health experts.

We will continue to work with education professional bodies and networks, representatives from the public, Catholic, and independent school sectors, and be informed by the feedback from the school communities that engage with the Initiative's supports.

We will also continue to work with parent representative organisations to ensure that our work is always informed by the views of parents and carers.

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If you have questions, ideas, concerns or other feedback about the Initiative you can submit them online at saisact.info email us at saisact@shfpact.org.au or call during business hours on 02 6247 3077.

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HOW DOES THE SAIS INITIATIVE WORK?

Schools in the ACT are committed to building and maintaining supportive and respectful learning environments. Sometimes schools need help in achieving this goal for same sex attracted, intersex and/or gender diverse people. In these cases, we can assist by offering training, advice and support. To access our services, a school does not have to 'formally join' or meet any additional guidelines or standards - our role is simply to assist and support schools to meet their existing goals and requirements.

- The SAIS Initiative only engages directly with schools who have requested support, information or expertise.
- Engagement with the SAIS Initiative is a voluntary decision by school leaders.
- School leaders are free to choose from the range of supports the SAIS Initiative can provide, and each of these can be tailored to best meet the needs and cultural contexts of particular school environments.
- The SAIS Initiative does not provide any classroom teaching of students or mandatory school resources or activities.
- The SAIS Initiative does not provide counselling or individual support to students.

The Initiative builds on commitments and a body of work that has already been undertaken in ACT schools and education programs. We work with whole school communities to build upon shared values of social responsibility, respectful relationships, and inclusion of diversity with respect to issues of gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation. Our focus is to help schools create, maintain and value safe, supportive and inclusive educational environments for everyone.

The Initiative recognises parents as a key part of school communities. We encourage school leaders to maintain open communication and engagement with parents about school activities and curriculum, using the same standards and processes they usually do for all other areas of school life.

WHAT SUPPORTS DOES THE SAIS INITIATIVE PROVIDE TO SCHOOLS?

We work with schools in a flexible way that is responsive to the needs and cultural contexts of particular school environments and community. We offer a range of supports that schools can select and tailor to their particular needs.

Stage One: Initial engagement and planning

Where school leadership requests support, SAIS Initiative staff will meet with executive and key staff to discuss needs and priority issues and develop an understanding of existing school environments and planning processes. Depending on the particular circumstances and needs, these meetings may include parents and students.



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ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

Stage Two: Support for specific school or education program needs

The following range of supports will be offered to schools who choose to engage with the SAIS Initiative:

Professional Learning Programs and other targeted training and information sessions.	<p>Assist teaching and student welfare staff to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and apply inclusive practices in the school environment; • Identify, adapt and use high-quality teaching/learning and health information resources; • Respond appropriately to individual student support and welfare needs.
Guidance for the identification and use of relevant high quality teaching and learning resources and materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support teachers to identify and share examples of relevant, high-quality teaching/learning resources and materials, noting their relative strengths, limitations, and effective use.
Supporting leadership opportunities for students, staff and parents/carers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with school leaders to identify and implement leadership opportunities and activities for student, parent/carer and staff that are appropriate within the particular school environment. • Provide mechanisms for schools to share learnings and outcomes from these opportunities and activities.
Provision of expert advice and support for schools as requested.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist development and implementation of school based processes and procedures for inclusive practices. • Provide expert guidance and advice to assist schools to support individual student wellbeing needs. • Link school staff and parents/carers to relevant health professionals as required. • Connect parents/carers with appropriate school-based and community-based supports.
Facilitating the sharing and use of evidence-informed approaches and good practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for school communities to connect with one another to share and improve practice through relevant professional networks and organisations, parent/carers community organisations, and periodic inter-school student leadership forums. • Utilise expertise of 'Leading Schools' to mentor and support other schools who seek this type of guidance.
Stakeholder engagement and coordination of support networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link school communities, health and community services, and other stakeholder groups to achieve the Initiative's goals. • Promote awareness of the supports available to ACT schools and education programs from health and community service organisations. • Assist those health and community services organisations who wish to coordinate their engagement with ACT schools and education programs.

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INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Stage Three: Connecting schools to others

The work of the SAIS Initiative is to help build expertise and strengthen connections within and outside of the education sector so that in the longer term, all ACT schools are confident and capable of building and maintaining safe and inclusive environments.

Educators and school leaders may benefit from connecting with one another to share their experience and approaches. This exchange provides both an opportunity to enrich a school's approach based on the learnings and experience of others, but also to contribute their expertise and insight through mentoring, advice and sharing.

Schools with a demonstrated track record of activity will be encouraged to share their experience and expertise, to mentor and support other educators and schools in the process of embedding inclusive practice within the education sector. Recognising 'leading schools' is part of the Initiative's long-term sustainability strategy.

DOES THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE PROVIDE EDUCATION MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS?

The SAIS Initiative does not produce or prescribe a specific set of curriculum teaching and learning materials. There are a wide range of materials available that may be relevant and useful, and new resources and materials are being produced all the time. Engagement with the ACT SAIS Initiative does not require a school to use any particular materials in its education program.

Existing resources available on the Student Wellbeing Hub maintained by the Australian Government studentwellbeing.gov.au include some that address diversity of sexual orientation, intersex status, and gender presentation/identity.

In the ACT, the Education Directorate does not provide or mandate the use of specific teaching materials in any subject area. Each school selects materials to develop its educational program. Schools and educators are already highly skilled at assessing the relevance and appropriateness of any teaching/learning materials they use on a case-by-case basis.

WHAT SUPPORT DOES THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE PROVIDE REGARDING EDUCATION AND INFORMATION MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS?

The SAIS Initiative provides guidance and advice about the selection and use of teaching/learning materials to support awareness of diversity in sexual orientation, intersex variation, and gender presentation/identity. This guidance and advice will align with the personal and social capabilities and other elements of the Australian Curriculum.

Over time, we will work with teachers and educators in the ACT to identify and review a range of useful teaching/learning resources and materials, identifying their strengths, limitations, and appropriate use.

Health and other information resources that may be relevant for students' needs in general, or for the specific needs of individual students, are produced by a number of government, health and community organisations. Wherever possible, the SAIS Initiative will point school staff to these existing resources. Schools and educators can then assess the relevance and appropriateness of any information materials they use on a case-by-case basis.



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The General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum include a range of cross-curricular themes, as well as personal and social knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that support students to become socially responsible members of society. The ability to respectfully live, work and participate in a shared community with others we may see as 'different' from ourselves is a shared social value and a necessary life skill.

Understanding this diversity and engaging respectfully with others are important components of creating safe, welcoming and inclusive school communities for all students and their families. As with other areas of difference between people, prejudice and discrimination can be challenged with awareness, empathy and respect. Diversity in sexual orientation, intersex variation, and gender presentation/identity is part of the community and social diversity children and young people live within, both now and after the school years.

HOW CAN EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL LEADERS RESPOND TO PARENT/CARER CONCERNS ABOUT EDUCATION MATERIALS THAT COVER DIVERSITY IN SEXUAL ORIENTATION, INTERSEX VARIATION, AND GENDER PRESENTATION/IDENTITY?

School leaders are best placed to understand and identify the specific information and communication needs of their school communities, which means that there is no one correct way to respond. Some things to consider might include:

- **Acknowledge** that parents/carers can have a broad range of views, values and attitudes towards the purpose of schooling in general, and specifically whether they think education about diversity in sexual orientation, intersex variation, and gender presentation/identity should be part of either the formal or informal curriculum. Understanding these views is important to educators and school leaders. Managing competing views is one of the challenges educators and school leaders face in other areas of their work as well.
- **Clarify** what the concerns or questions are. Generally, parents and carers want to understand the learning agenda in their child's school. Don't assume that a question or concern means that someone is opposed to school being safe, welcoming and inclusive environment. Remember that parents/carers may make different parenting choices from one another about how and when they wish to communicate about these issues, and can feel concerned that they won't be prepared to answer questions from their child if they don't know what is being talked about at school.
- **Be proactive** in communicating about the school's education program. Parents and carers are entitled to be informed about what will be covered in their child's learning. This communication can include introductory presentations and information provided at the beginning of the school year or term, information sent home periodically in newsletters and emails, or in notes about specific curriculum enrichment activities. Information about the schools approach to learning, the purpose of a specific activity, and links or references to the Australian Curriculum or relevant legislation or policy, can also be helpful to provide where possible.
- **Follow existing processes.** Parents and carers become familiar with how their child's school communicates. Schools already have requirements, processes and policy for obtaining parental consent to student participation in activities, including excursions and invitations to guest speakers or external organisations. Schools also have existing processes for the selection and use of education materials. In this area of learning, follow the processes you would for any other area of learning or school activity.
- **Respond promptly** and factually to parent/carer inquiries and questions.



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