

## INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS



### 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 and education programs to develop and maintain safe, inclusive environments for all students regardless of their gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation.

This includes supporting individual student needs, welcoming and celebrating community and family diversity, and building school cultures where prejudice, discrimination, harassment or violence is unacceptable on the basis of gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation.

**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?

Families and education professionals understand that helping children and young people 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.

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 teachers recognise that school is a place where same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse people often experience exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, harassment and even violence.

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 more effectively address these responsibilities. The Initiative has been specifically developed to help meet this need.

#### HOW HAS THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS (SAIS) INITIATIVE BEEN DEVELOPED?

The 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 parent representative organisations to ensure that our work is informed by the views of parents and carers.

#### HOW DOES THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE WORK?

Schools and education programs in the ACT are committed to building and maintaining supportive and respectful learning environments. Sometimes schools and education programs 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 school staff and leadership. 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.

Parents and carers are the first educators of their children and continue to play a critical role throughout their children's learning and development. Recognising this, the SAIS Initiative, although primarily focussed on working with schools and education programs, can also assist parents/carers and families to find information and/or professional support which they may find helpful.

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#### MORE INFORMATION?

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

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### ARE SCHOOLS REQUIRED TO ACCESS SUPPORTS?

- The SAIS Initiative only engages directly with schools that 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 promotes the use of the Australian Curriculum in helping students develop skills in recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others and understanding relationships and establishing and building positive respectful relationships.
- The SAIS Initiative does not engage in classroom teaching of students or provide mandatory school resources or activities.

The Initiative works 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, in doing this, is to help schools create, maintain and value safe, supportive and inclusive educational environments for everyone.

The Initiative recognises parents/carers 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.

### WHY IS THE SCHOOL-HOME PARTNERSHIP IMPORTANT?

Children and adolescents are engaged in the developmental process of discovering and forming their own identity and place in the world. For some young people, this may involve periods of questioning or exploring issues of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. For all young people, this involves the formation of values and attitudes about relationships, individual and social responsibility, appropriate conduct and ethics.

**PARENTS ARE THE FIRST EDUCATORS OF THEIR CHILDREN AND REMAIN CRITICAL THROUGHOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT. PARENTS/CARERS MAY MAKE DIFFERENT PARENTING CHOICES FROM ONE ANOTHER ABOUT HOW AND WHEN THEY WISH TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT THESE ISSUES.**

For most children and young people, school is the primary place where they engage with their peers. In this context it is inevitable that children and young people become aware of diversity within their schooling environments – this includes diversity related to gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation. School becomes a place where different life experiences, different moral, religious and cultural perspectives come together. We all want our children to develop the skills that enable them 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.

Schools have curriculum and student wellbeing/pastoral care responsibilities that mean that schools and families complement each other to educate and support the social and emotional development of children and young people. This Initiative aims to strengthen this partnership through providing strategies and appropriate information for both families and school staff.

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

ACT Safe and Inclusive Schools 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 [www.studentwellbeing.gov.au](http://www.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.

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

In professional learning programs and in response to specific requests from schools, 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 aligns 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.

### WHY DO ACT SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS INCLUDE INFORMATION ABOUT DIVERSITY IN SEXUAL ORIENTATION, INTERSEX VARIATION, AND GENDER PRESENTATION/IDENTITY IN THEIR EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

All education sectors in Australia – public, Catholic, and independent – acknowledge the Australian Curriculum as a foundational reference point for teaching and learning. The Australian Curriculum describes to teachers, parents, students and others in the wider community what is to be taught and the quality of learning expected of young people as they progress through school. Go to [australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://australiancurriculum.edu.au) for more information.

How the Australian Curriculum gets implemented is a more complex matter. Each Australian State and Territory, and schools within each education sector, approach implementation in different ways.

- All Canberra public, primary and high schools are required to follow the Australian Curriculum. Information about how the Australian Curriculum is being implemented in Canberra public schools can be found here: [education.act.gov.au/teaching\\_and\\_learning/curriculum\\_programs](http://education.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/curriculum_programs)
- Information about how the curriculum is implemented in schools run by the Catholic Education Office of the Archdioceses of Canberra-Goulburn can be found here: [cg.catholic.edu.au/parents/curriculum/act-curriculum](http://cg.catholic.edu.au/parents/curriculum/act-curriculum)
- Independent schools are individually responsible for identifying and communicating to their school communities how they implement the Australian Curriculum.



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### HOW DOES THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE SUPPORT PARENTS/CARERS?

Our work with parent/carer groups shows that not all families feel confident providing appropriate and accurate information and support in relation to their children who may be questioning or exploring issues of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. We can support parents/carers to develop their knowledge and confidence in responding to these issues in ways that feel comfortable for them, and connect them with other health and community organisations who provide ongoing support.

#### How the Initiative can support parents/carers:

- We can provide you with accurate information so that you feel more confident about the decisions you make, but we won't tell parents/carers what they 'should' do in any given situation.
- We can work with you and with your school to respond to specific issues affecting your child, but we cannot require or direct a school to take specific action or do any particular thing.
- We can connect you with relevant health and community service supports, and information about relevant legislation and complaints handling processes, but we do not provide counselling, case management supports, or legal advice.
- We can also work directly with parent/carer groups in your school community to support your role in creating and maintaining safe, inclusive and welcoming communities.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS/CARERS DO TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS TO BE SAFE, WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE?

Parents/carers in all school communities have a critical role in modelling and supporting the development of respectful and positive behaviour.

This could include:

- Talking with children about the different kinds of diversity that exist in our community.
- Encouraging children to understand, be welcoming and respectful of difference in others.
- Teaching children that they always deserve to feel comfortable to be who they are, be included and to feel safe and respected.
- Acknowledging that diversity in our community can bring challenges as we work out how to relate to one another respectfully when we disagree about things that are important to us.
- Supporting children to feel safe to speak up if they see others behaving inappropriately.
- Participating in events or activities that recognise or celebrate different kinds of diversity.
- Contributing to the development of inclusive school policies and actions.
- Communicating your support and encouragement for your school community to be inclusive and welcoming of diversity.

**WE ALL WANT OUR CHILDREN TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS THAT ENABLE THEM 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.**

### WHAT CAN PARENTS/CARERS DO IF YOU HAVE FURTHER QUESTIONS AND/OR CONCERNS?

Parents should have access to accurate information about what their children are being taught within school environments. If parents have questions and/or concerns about these issues, they should raise them directly with their school using existing contact points.

The Safe and Inclusive Schools (SAIS) Initiative is committed to operating in transparent, ethical and accountable ways, with open communication and a willingness to participate in genuine conversations regarding questions or concerns.

We welcome and value questions, ideas, concerns or other feedback from parents regarding the specific work being undertaken by the SAIS Initiative, see details below.

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