

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE



ACT SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS (SAIS) INITIATIVE

BUILDING ON WORK ALREADY DONE

ACT schools and education programs have been responding to the needs of children and young people in the areas of sexuality and gender for many decades. This has included advancing gender equity in educational and employment choices, addressing sexual harassment and gender stereotypes, providing developmentally-appropriate sexual health and relationships education programs, and responding to the individual welfare and support needs of students and families.

Schools recognise that they need to be responsive to the needs of all young people, including those who may be intersex or have diverse gender identities or sexual orientations. Same sex attracted, intersex, and gender diverse people have always been part of school communities, whether visible to others or not. As awareness of this diversity has grown, community expectations and legal standards about inclusion and anti-discrimination have also evolved. This means that schools are increasingly required to identify and respond to student and family needs in these areas.

Canberra public schools are required by the Safe and Supportive Schools Policy and Procedures to actively respond to particular groups who may be at particular risk of bullying, harassment or violence, including on the basis of gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation. Similarly, the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn Education Wellbeing and Diversity Framework provides guidance to schools within the Catholic education system.

Schools previously have also accessed professional learning and advice on the best approaches to support students from the ACT Safe Schools Coalition Australia (SSCA) program. This program stopped operating in the ACT in October 2016, and is now replaced by the ACT Government funded Safe and Inclusive Schools (SAIS) Initiative.

HOW WAS THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE DEVELOPED?

The SAIS Initiative has been developed with the input of a range of education, parent, health/community and professional organisations. It is supported by the ACT Government, funded through the ACT Education Directorate and delivered by Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT (SHFPACT) with the support of other health and community organisations. The development of the Initiative has been informed by:

- consultations and feedback regarding the experiences of school and educational programs within the ACT in responding to issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status;
- critiques of the original SSCA program (from both advocates and opponents);
- feedback from parents, principals, teachers and students; and
- the ACT context which includes existing ACT legislation and policy frameworks related to anti-discrimination, social participation, inclusion and student well-being in schools.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SAIS INITIATIVE

The goal of the Initiative is that school and educational programs within the ACT are safe, inclusive environments for all students regardless of their gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation. For schools in the ACT, this includes building the capacity of school staff to support 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.

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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 email us at saisact@shfpact.org.au or call during business hours on 02 6247 3077.

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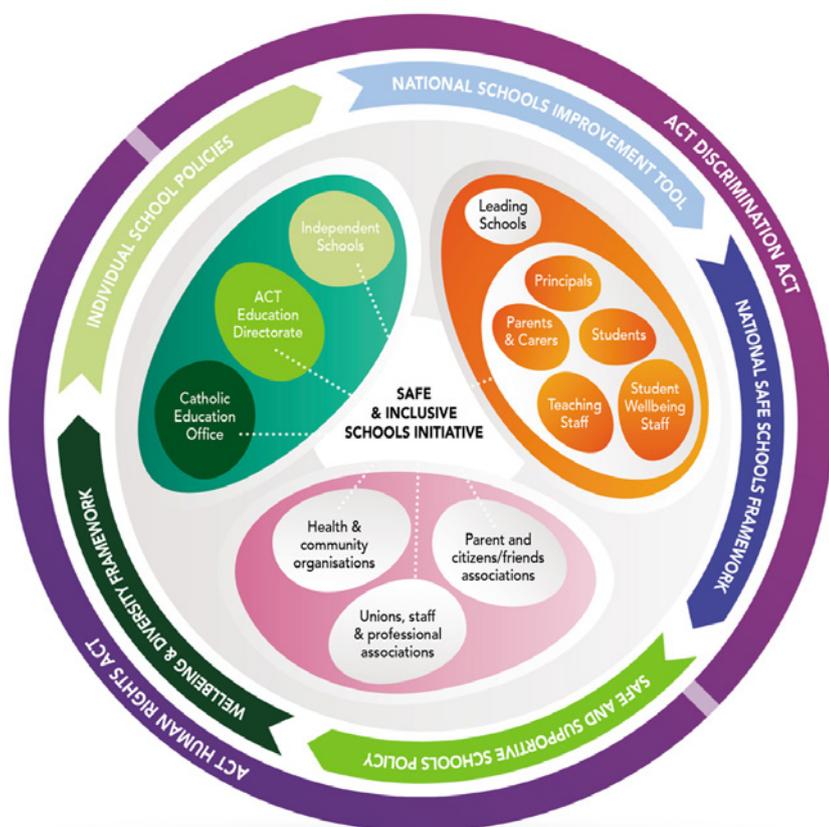
Program objectives:

- 1) Build the capacity (knowledge, skills and confidence) of ACT schools to support same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, staff and families within school communities;
- 2) Build the capacity of ACT schools to actively include same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, school staff and families;
- 3) Increase the knowledge, understanding and awareness by the whole school community of the needs and issues faced by young people in relation to their sexual orientation, gender presentation/identity and intersex status with the aim of reducing prejudice, discrimination and harassment based on sexuality, sex and gender diversity;
- 4) Assist school communities (school leaders, teaching and student welfare staff, parents/carers and students) to model and share effective approaches to achieving the above objectives and ensure ongoing sustainability by embedding them within existing networks and practices.

HOW DOES THE SAIS INITIATIVE WORK?

Schools in the ACT are committed to ongoing processes of school improvement including providing supportive and respectful environments for all students. Like the rest of the community, schools and education programs are also required to ensure they comply with ACT and Australian laws like the ACT Human Rights Act 2004 and Discrimination Act 1991, or the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984. The SAIS Initiative offers assistance ACT schools and education programs in meeting their legislative, education frameworks and policy requirements as they apply to gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation. The SAIS Initiative supports those school communities that identify that they could benefit from the supports the Initiative provides.

The Initiative works with whole school communities, educational systems and community agencies to build upon the already existing values of social responsibility, respectful relationships, and inclusion of diversity. The focus is on helping schools to work with all students to create, maintain and value safe, supportive and inclusive educational environments for everyone.



THE SAIS INITIATIVE ADVOCATES THAT:

- school communities that are working to understand, welcome and be inclusive of everyone, regardless of their gender identity/presentation, intersex status or sexual orientation, are better environments for all students, staff and families;
- inclusion and anti-harassment strategies work in a complementary manner, and must address the stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination that underpin bullying, harassment and violence when they occur;
- all children and young people need opportunities to develop and apply 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 necessary life skill.

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WHAT SUPPORTS ARE AVAILABLE?

The SAIS Initiative works with schools in a flexible way that is responsive to the needs and cultural contexts of particular school environments. The Initiative offers a range of supports that schools can select and tailor to their particular needs. Where school leadership requests support, SAIS Initiative staff will meet with executive and any relevant key staff, parents and students to discuss needs and priority issues and develop an understanding of existing school environments and planning processes.

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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