

05 August 2024

Ms Anita Dow MP

Chair

Inquiry into Discrimination and Bullying in Tasmanian Schools

Government Administration Committee A

Parliament of Tasmania

HOBART TAS 7000

Dear Ms Dow,

The Australian Council for Student Voice (ACSV) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Discrimination and Bullying in Tasmanian Schools.

Discrimination and bullying, whether direct or indirect, has a profound and lasting impact on all members of the school community. While we wish this was not the case, we have heard many examples of direct discrimination in schools, including overt actions such as exclusion or verbal abuse based on race, gender, ability, and sexuality. We have also heard of indirect discrimination through systemic issues that disproportionately affect certain staff and students.

Action on bullying and harassment, including cyberbullying, is essential. These actions create a hostile and unsafe environment, adversely affecting mental health, academic performance, and overall wellbeing. It is essential for students to play a key role in responding to bullying and discrimination. Through genuine opportunities to engage, including regular feedback mechanisms and fostering student-led advocacy, students can inform policy and practice relating to bullying and discrimination in schools.

In preparing this submission we have consulted with our members, who bring a diverse perspective across secondary school students, educators, school leaders, teacher-educators, academics and other support organisations, in a variety of different educational environments across the country.

Our members have shared some examples of practice with us and have highlighted the disparity across schools. Some schools have robust policies and proactive measures, while others lag. Some great examples we have seen include:

- **Peer Support Programs:** Establishing a student-led peer mentoring and support groups where students can share their experiences and support each other. See [Joseph Banks Secondary College \(WA\)](#).
- **Whole-School Approach:** Fostering a school culture that supports all students and staff contributing to whole-school approaches to mental health and wellbeing promotion. See [Promote a Culture of Kindness \(Project Rockit\)](#)
- **On-site practitioners:** Employing on-site mental health practitioners who are easily accessible to students and staff and provide confidential support, including early intervention for specific cohorts. See [Mental Health Practitioners in Schools \(VIC\)](#)
- **Online Support:** Enabling access to anonymous online support platforms that provide immediate assistance and resources. See [My Circle \(Kids Helpline\)](#)

It is essential that any action includes genuine opportunities for students to express their voice and take agency over their own lives. Students should be engaged and have a should have a formal role in decision-making processes related to school policies and initiatives on bullying and discrimination. We recommend the following strategies for the implementation of student voice, agency, and partnerships to tackle bullying and discrimination:

- **Regular Feedback Mechanisms:** Establishing and conducting regular opportunities and mechanisms to gather feedback from students about their experiences and perceptions of safety and inclusivity in schools. The results should inform policy and practice at a system-wide level.
- **Student Advocacy Programs:** Empowering and supporting students to become advocates and leaders who can champion anti-bullying and anti-discrimination initiatives within their schools.

- **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Ensuring that students are a consistent part of the decision-making process at a school-, region-, and system-wide level when developing and implementing policies related to bullying and discrimination.

Action on bullying and harassment is essential to create a safe and supportive environments that promote mental health, academic performance, and overall wellbeing for all members of the school community. Through engaging students through regular feedback mechanisms and fostering student-led advocacy both in schools and across the system can inform stronger policy and practice. We would also recommend the adoption of initiatives which have seen success elsewhere, such as peer support programs, whole-school approaches to mental health and wellbeing, on-site mental health practitioners, and greater access to anonymous online support platforms.

In combination with these initiatives, it is essential that any action includes genuine opportunities for students to express their voices and take agency over their education. Students should have a formal role in decision-making processes related to school policies and initiatives on bullying and discrimination.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission, and please let us know if we can be of any further assistance to the inquiry.

Kind Regards,

A black rectangular box redacting a signature. To the left of the box, there are several short, horizontal, multi-colored lines in shades of blue, green, yellow, and orange.

Mr Mitchell Sprague
Executive Director, Australian Council for Student Voice