

Equal Opportunity Policy Checklist

A checklist for Victorian Government schools to assess or develop an Equal Opportunity (EO) and anti-harassment policy

What is a safe and inclusive school?

In a safe and inclusive school, the school community feels welcome, supported and physically and emotionally secure. The school community works collaboratively to build a 'culture' where human rights and dignity are respected, and in doing so, the diversity of staff and students are respected. Every student and staff member of the school is encouraged to achieve their potential.

A safe and inclusive school has:

- respect and understanding for human rights and embraces the [Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities](#) in school activities, education and culture
- A principal and other school leaders who are committed to publicly promoting equal opportunity to the school community
teaching and learning practices that incorporate the diversity of the school community
- processes and systems in place that uphold and communicate equal opportunity and human rights to be enjoyed and promoted in the school.
- processes and systems in place that uphold and communicate these values
- strategies to ensure that everyone is accountable for maintaining the highest standards of behaviour
- information on how to prevent discrimination, harassment, bullying, vilification or victimisation, and where to seek help if these behaviours occur
- mechanisms for complaints to be addressed and resolved in a fair and consistent manner.

The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* makes EO a human right. Under the Charter, individuals are to be treated equally and have the right to have effective protection against discrimination. To ensure a safe school, no member of the school community will be treated less favourably because of irrelevant personal characteristics, whether actual or assumed, such as age, disability, gender identity, industrial activity, political belief or activity, race, religious belief or activity, sex and sexual orientation. Nor will such characteristics affect access to benefits and services provided by the school. View a full list of personal characteristics protected under state EO law, go to the [EO Policy Template](#).

A safe and inclusive school acknowledges that people who experience discrimination do not always feel comfortable about making a complaint. Therefore, a safe and inclusive school will pro-actively identify and monitor potentially discriminatory and harassing behaviours which may be occurring at school and develop strategies to prevent them occurring.

Why is EO important?

EO, as both a key component of the law and now as a human right under the Charter is essential to the wellbeing of the whole school community and to creating a safe and inclusive school. It is impossible to effectively teach, learn or work in a discriminatory or harassing environment. EO is also a legal requirement under [federal and state legislation](#) as well as departmental policy.

How does EO apply to Victorian Government schools?

In Victorian Government schools, EO legislation applies to education, goods and service provision, employment and sport and as principal, EO is your responsibility. The School Council and the State of Victoria also share legal responsibility and liability in respect of EO at your school.

How to use the checklist

Take a few minutes to complete the following checklist. This will help you assess how well your school may be meeting its EO responsibilities. You can use the checklist to assess your school's EO policy and identify any additional steps that may be necessary to ensure your school is as safe and inclusive as possible. Alternatively you can use it to develop an appropriate EO policy for your school. A regular review of the EO policy and procedures is recommended..

Tools and resources

Save precious time and ensure you meet your obligations. Use the following tools and resources, as relevant, to effectively promote and implement EO:

- view and download a sample [EO policy template](#) that you can adapt and use in your school.
- view and download the Department's complaints procedures for staff ([Guidelines for Complaints, Misconduct and Unsatisfactory Performance](#)) and parents ([Parents Complaints](#))
- view how to effectively implement and promote EO policy and practice, see the [EO Guidelines](#). These include case studies based on the experiences of diverse Victorian Government schools.

EO checklist for Victorian Government school principals

Please place a tick beside all of the following statements that apply to your school.

- Your school has an EO policy.
- This is critical to meeting your legal responsibilities. If you cannot tick this box, you can use this checklist to help you develop a policy that reflects and meets the unique needs of your school community. You can also view and download a [sample EO policy](#) here.
- Your school is aware of the procedures for resolving EO related issues, problems and complaints.
- This is also critical to meeting your legal responsibilities. If you did not tick this box, you should view and download the Department's [Guidelines for Complaints, Misconduct and Unsatisfactory Performance](#) for staff, view and download the [Parents Complaints](#) template and consider the information on the Victorian Equal opportunity and Human Rights Commission [Safe Schools](#) web pages to meet the unique needs of your school community.
- The EO Policy is written so that the whole school community can understand it.
- The EO Policy is accessible to the whole school community. Consider translations in relevant key languages.
- Your school's EO policy includes an introductory statement of support for EO that directly links EO and human rights to the school's mission, vision and strategic plan.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement of support for equity and diversity across the whole school community.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement that illustrates key benefits of EO and diversity to the whole school community. If you did not tick this box, you can view and download information on the Victorian Equal opportunity and Human Rights Commission [Safe Schools](#) web pages.
- Your school's EO policy states who and what it covers.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement that diversity enriches the school and that irrelevant personal characteristics such as sex, race and disability will not mean less favourable treatment or negatively affect an individual's access to benefits and services provided by the (name) school.
- Your school's EO policy includes a clear statement that [discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, vilification, bullying](#) and other unfair, detrimental or inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated at your school under any circumstances.
- Your school's policy includes definitions and examples of the kinds of behaviour that may constitute discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, vilification, victimisation or other inappropriate behaviour in clear terms that everyone in the school community can understand.

- Your school's EO policy includes a statement of commitment to create a safe, inclusive and physically and emotionally secure learning and working environment that caters to the needs of the whole school community.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement of the school's commitment to actively prevent discrimination, harassment, bullying, vilification, victimisation or other unacceptable and unlawful behaviour, and to make the school a discrimination and harassment free place.
- Your school's EO policy lists other relevant school and departmental documents and sources of information.
- Your school's EO policy includes statements of rights, responsibilities and accountability relevant to all members of the school community.
- Your school's EO policy includes guidelines about what to do about an EO issue or complaint.
- Your school's EO policy explains and applies principles of fairness, sensitivity, promptness and confidentiality.
- Your school's EO policy describes the kinds of action that will be taken to resolve issues or complaints.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement that no one who makes an EO complaint in good faith will be victimised or otherwise subjected to any disadvantage or detriment because they made or might make such a complaint.
- Your school's EO policy lists sources of additional information and support.
- Your school's EO policy includes a statement committing the school to regularly review the policy and monitor its implementation.
- No matter how many items on this list you have ticked, assessing your school's EO implementation is a great beginning. If there are any steps mentioned above that you haven't yet completed, you will find some useful tools on HRWeb [Equal Opportunity, Discrimination and Harassment](#) web page.