

Charter of Human Rights and Victorian Schools Checklist

The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* is one simple but important law that sets out our freedoms, rights and responsibilities. This formal recognition of our human rights helps to protect people from injustice and allows everyone to participate in and contribute to society. The purpose of the Charter is to protect and promote human rights by recognising that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The Charter is founded on the following principles found in the Preamble:

- Human rights are essential in a democratic and inclusive society that respects the rule of law, human dignity, equality and freedom;
- Human rights belong to all people without discrimination, and the diversity of the people of Victoria enhances our community;
- Human rights come with responsibilities and must be exercised in a way that respects the human rights of others;
- Human rights have a special importance for the Aboriginal people of Victoria, as descendants of Australia's first people, with their diverse spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters.

Schools are uniquely placed to assist develop this culture of human rights. They have particular responsibilities and compliance obligations as public authorities, as well as a significant and important role in educating and shaping the values of Victoria's young people and future leaders.

Schools are a place for learning. Incorporating a human rights framework in all of their activities will ensure that schools embed a culture of human rights through which students and teachers can be engaged to contribute to positive cultural change in Victoria.

Of course, equal opportunity remains a key focus and consideration for schools to ensure they are creating an inclusive and safe school environment. However, the Charter offers a broader framework under which equality of opportunity is one of the 20 human rights protected by the Charter.

Schools should aim to protect and promote these rights. Some examples of the human rights set out in the Charter that may be applicable in schools include:

Recognition and equality before the law

- *equal opportunity policies*
- *fair decision making processes*
- *school built environment and accessibility*

Protection of families and children

- *considering human rights when making decision that may affect family life*
- *child protection considerations*

Right to life

- *safe school environment*
- *safe work environment*

Cultural rights

- *valuing diversity*
- *language programs*

Freedom of expression

- *valuing expression of opinions and encouraging greater participation in public life*

Privacy and reputation

- *valuing and respecting student privacy*
- *good records management*

Checklist to be 'human rights aware'

- Your school is aware of the obligations and rights set out under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*.
- Your school is aware that equal opportunity (EO) is a human right and has completed an EO policy checklist.
- Your school has reviewed (or has a plan to review) existing policies, practices and procedures to ensure compatibility with human rights.
- Human rights are now a key consideration in any planning or strategic review process.
- Your school is aware of what resources are available to support human rights compliance and knows who to ask if there are any Charter queries.
- Your school has checked that its decision-making processes are compatible with human rights.
- Your school has established a commitment to human rights and has considered ways to incorporate them within the existing culture of the school performance management, recruitment and induction process and in its communication activities.
- Your school is considering ways to incorporate human rights into its educational activities and functions.
- Staff and students are supported and rewarded for incorporating and including human rights considerations in all of their work.
- Your school has policies to respond to Charter related complaints (or has sought advice on how this might be developed).