

Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) Response to National Anti-Bullying Rapid Review

20 June 2025

About QPASTT

QPASTT is a federal and state government funded, community-based refugee torture and trauma recovery service. We offer a range of clinical, peer, psychosocial, collective healing and wellbeing orientated interventions. We work with children, young people, adults, families and communities. We are a specialist refugee trauma recovery service and our service framework has a strong psychosocial, inclusion and justice orientation. We work with and alongside survivors of refugee trauma, to liberate from the harms of torture and trauma with a focus on fostering healing and belonging, thriving futures and seeking justice.

QPASTT youth focused services are delivered to individuals and groups in our various locations across Queensland, in schools and in community settings. These services include counselling, youth work, mentoring, group work, capacity building and advocacy. We also provide sector development services included professional development training and resources to guide trauma informed and culturally safe service provision to survivors of refugee trauma and their families.

In the financial year ending 2024, QPASTT worked with over 730 school aged children and young people in counselling and registered group work. QPASTT staff working with children and young people in over 60 schools across Queensland. In addition, our community youth work programs engaged with hundreds of children and young people via drop-in programs and community-based events.

QPASTT's response to the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review Consultation Paper is informed by our work with children, young people and their families for the past 30 years. The clients and communities we work with are survivors of refugee torture and trauma, from culturally diverse backgrounds with a lived experience of forced migration. This is a student cohort that is recognised by the Productivity Commission as being a high risk of educational disadvantage¹.

¹ Productivity Commission (2022) *Review of the National School Reform Agreement*, Study Report, Canberra.

Intention of Response

QPASTT recognises the importance of a robust anti-bullying framework, with effective policies and procedures to protect students from harm. QPASTT acknowledges the detrimental impact of bullying on learning, wellbeing and social connections. QPASTT affirms the commitment of the Department of Education to establish consistent national approach to anti-bullying, and the intention of this rapid review.

However, it is imperative that we highlight the pervasive prevalence of racism within Australian schools that requires urgent attention. We take this opportunity to highlight the experience of racism that children and young people from migrant and refugee background, and their families endure. We encourage the creation of a robust national anti-racism framework to sit alongside a robust anti-bullying framework. Racism and bullying must be recognised as distinct forms of harm as:

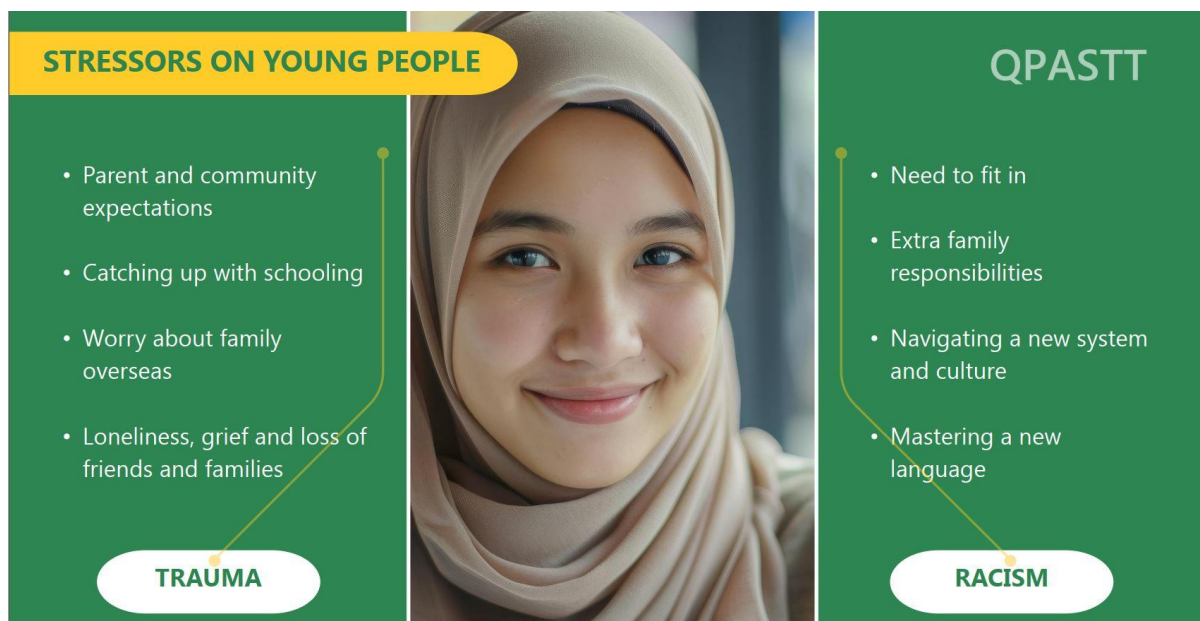
- While race can be used to bully, experiences of racism can happen independently of bullying.
- Similar to bullying, experiences of racism can have significant impact on a young person mental health, however in the case of racism this mental health impact can occur in response to a single incident.
- Experiences of racism not only impact the individual/s that it is directed at, but also peers from similar backgrounds who witness the racism (bystander impact).
- When students report racism, teachers tend to consider this a form of bullying and therefore minimise or overlook the systemic nature of racial bias that fuels interpersonal expressions of racism. An effective response to racism is more nuanced than an interpersonal conflict response.
- While only addressing racialised bullying, institutional and systemic racism such as what lawyer and human rights advocate Nyadol Nyuon calls the “tyranny of low expectations”² are not addressed.

QPASTT posits that the response to both racism and bullying needs to be complementary to reinforce the aims of both. Creating an anti-bullying framework and strategy without addressing racialised discrimination expressed through interpersonal, structural or institutional racism further marginalises and silences the experience of students from refugee background.

There are three significant aspects of student life for children and young people from refugee backgrounds, that if continue to remain unaddressed will perpetuate educational and wellbeing inequity:

- (i) There is a failure to recognise the degree of "code switching" that children and young people from diverse backgrounds must do daily to manage family, social, education and employment systems and expectations (see graphic below). This is often exacerbated when teachers, other school staff and peers make incorrect assumptions of attitude and behaviour, as they do not perceive the range of responsibilities many young people from refugee background carry. This misperception of attitude and behaviour can fuel racialised assumptions and reactions.

² ABC news report (2022) [African Students Subjected to N Word – Racism in Schools](#). Published 19 October 2022.



- (ii) Schools commonly do not engage well with families of students from refugee backgrounds, providing most communication in written English only or relying on bi-cultural liaison staff to manage the relationship between the school and families. This diminishes the support parents and caregivers can provide on school related matters, as they are effectively excluded from school community. Consequently, children and young people from refugee backgrounds can feel like they must manage any school challenges, including bullying and racism, alone. Additionally, when parents attempt to engage with schools to report racism or bullying, they are frequently ignored and “gate kept” from appropriate reporting pathways³. This undermines parents’ ability to protect their children from harm and erodes the child’s sense of safety.

Drivers of education inequity occur both inside and outside of education settings, however, schools have a responsibility to both address inequities within educational settings and ameliorate those that occur outside of educational settings⁴. This needs a dual focus that both empowers parents and families with the skills and knowledge of education systems **and** skills up schools to effectively engage with parents and families. This will enable whole of family support for the student’s education. This means not only targeting students at risk of disengagement but also parents and families who are struggling to engage with the school system and supports.

- (iii) There is a society-wide failure to address racism within the significant systems that children, young people and their families interact with - especially education and employment systems. The burden of this has a largely unrecognised impact on mental

³ Parents have shared with QPASTT numerous experiences of being dismissed by school administration staff who make statements such as “I don’t understand your English” or whose knowledge is minimised because of a perception that parents from refugee background are uneducated or uninformed.

⁴ See Varadharajan, et al (2021) *Amplify Insights: Education Inequity*. Centre for Social Impact, UNSW Sydney. Eacott, et al., (2022). *Building education systems for equity and inclusion*. Sydney, NSW: Gonski Institute for Education.

health and wellbeing of students from refugee or diverse backgrounds. Students from refugee backgrounds have frequently report to QPASTT staff that racism is the greatest impact on their mental health, with studies finding that as many as 100% of young people from racialised backgrounds experiencing racism in school⁵. Furthermore, students report experiencing racism from teachers and other school staff, which is also identified in research literature⁶. This is even more difficult for students to report and seek redress.

What policies, models or practices (i.e. interventions) do you feel are not working?

EALD units and supports within education system in Queensland have been eroded and under-resourced over the past decade which has led to a significant loss in linguistic and education expertise and created a gap for effective culturally informed school-based supports. Well-functioning and integrated EALD supports can assist students from diverse linguistic backgrounds to participate in the school environment, and foster equity, diversity and inclusion within the school community. The erosion of EALD resourcing is a national trend as recognised by the Australian Council of TESOL Associations⁷.

Recent research from the Australian Education Research Organisation that compares nine years of learning outcomes data between EALD and non EALD students in New South Wales found that it takes on average six years for students to catch up with their peers, if provided with targeted EALD learning support⁸. This indicates how vital specialist EALD support is to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds can achieve alongside their peers. Without this specialised education expertise, there cannot be educational equity amongst the Australia student population, which as acknowledged in the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review consultation paper, is correlated to the experience of bullying.

While there has been increase resourcing for wellbeing supports within schools, these roles/supports tend to be clinical in nature and are not catering to the needs of young people from refugee or diverse backgrounds. Services such as QPASTT and other FASSTT agencies that offer culturally safe and trauma informed supports for students, face substantial obstacles to provide interventions on the school campus or to assist in the professional development and practice of school staff.

Bullying reporting mechanisms, are not well known by families of refugee background. Students and parents report to QPASTT that they do not think that reporting will make a difference, or that their complaints will be believed as there is low racial literacy amongst educators in Australia. They also worry that in reporting, the student will be a further target of victimisation. This is also consistent

⁵ Queensland African Community Council and African Youth Support Council (2024) *Experiences Young People of African Backgrounds in schools and Bicultural Workers in Workplaces in Queensland, Australia*.

⁶ N Priest, S Chong, M Truong, M Sharif, K Dunn, Y Paradies, J Nelson, O Alam, A Ward and A Kavanagh (2019) *Findings from the 2017 Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) student and staff surveys*. Centre for Social Research and Methods Working Paper no. 3/2019. Australian National University.

⁷ ACTA (2017) *Submission to the Review into Educational Excellence in Australian School*.

⁸ Lu, L., Wan, W.-Y., Groves, O., & Hammond, J. (2025.) *How long it takes to learn English while learning the curriculum*. Australian Education Research Organisation.



with national studies on racism⁹. Additionally, there is insufficient feedback mechanisms to ensure that children, young people and their families are kept informed on the progress of investigations.

What changes do you think are needed to improve bullying prevention and response:

Anti-racist and anti-bullying strategies must have sufficient long-term resourcing, tangible actions, milestones, and regular reporting on achievement towards strategy actions and milestones. As detailed above, our response in this section will detail needed improvements to prevent racialised bullying, interpersonal, systemic and institutional racism.

Firstly, it is fundamental to acknowledge that racism is a highly sensitive topic in Australia. It is imperative to recognise that confronting racism will cause discomfort and to develop an approach that encourages rather than alienates. Racism needs to be addressed firmly and clearly, in a manner which is authentic and warm to allow people to gain skills in identifying conscious and unconscious racial bias in perceptions of others and in systems and processes.

The Queensland African Community Council framework for addressing racism in schools and workplaces¹⁰ includes three types of prevention and three levels of prevention which is summaries in the table below. QPASTT endorses this approach as a robust anti-racism framework.

Three types of prevention	Three levels of prevention
<u>Primary prevention</u> – before discrimination occurs - Promote awareness, respect for and understanding of diversity - Unconscious bias training (recognised prejudice) - Anti-racism policy – zero tolerance and expectation of behaviour - Open dialogue about racism	<u>Micro</u> – individual behaviours including bystanders - Recognition and mitigation of microaggression - Encourage self-reflection and empathy
<u>Secondary prevention</u> – early intervention and first signs of racism - Safe reporting mechanism, including anonymous - Conflict resolution and mediation services - Restorative justice practices to increase understanding and co-operation	<u>Meso</u> – community, class, team, organisation, family - Revise curriculum - Cultural dialogues and interactions - Employee/student resource groups - Engaging diverse communities and families in classrooms and school
<u>Tertiary prevention</u> – reduce long term effects of racism Comprehensive support for those effected by racism	<u>Macro</u> – system, school, institution - Transparent data analysis - Accountability of funding and resourcing

⁹ See Priest et al (2019); and Arashiro, Zuleika (2022) *Racism in Schools: African Australian Students Speak Up*. Ubuntu Project and Yuimaru Partnerships.

¹⁰ QACC AYSC (2024) *Proposal to address racism in schools and workplaces*.

• Co-designed and implemented with affected communities • If conflict resolution/mediation fails and/or racism repeated – corrective action taken	• Quotas for leadership diversity, and career pathways
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Additionally, QPASTT offers the following three recommendations:

1. Increase bi-cultural staffing, peer support models and capacity of professionally trained lived expertise workforce: If children, young people and families enter a school they can see people that look and sound like them, their confidence that that they will understand and connect with the school community is enhanced. This will minimise the burden of code switching and provide a sense of familiarity when seeking help. However, it is imperative that these bi-cultural educator roles are integrated with the whole school systems rather than delegating students from diverse background to be the responsibility of identified staff only. Increased staffing of bi-cultural and professionally trained lived expertise workforce will support a diversified education workforce, and if well integrated, will enhance the racial literacy of the sector.
2. Practical commitment to genuine inclusion and engagement for diverse children, young people and their families in all aspects of school life. This requires school staff at all positions to have foundational knowledge in racial literacy, cultural safety, trauma informed practice and awareness of refugee experience. School staff should complete regular professional development and training on racism/ anti-racism, intergenerational trauma, cultural safety, diverse understandings of learning and wellbeing, and effective use of interpreters. The education sector needs to review of communication and engagement strategies to ensure that families from diverse backgrounds are well informed and warmly encouraged to participate in each school community. At a minimum, it is imperative that schools offer:
 - (i) school based and after-hours support at times that suit families' multiple commitments
 - (ii) communication in multiple languages and using interpreters as required for all interactions with parents and caregivers

What resources are available for school staff to support action on bullying? What else would help build capability to support staff to prevent and manage bullying?

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) has an excellent suite of resources and trainings under the project School Standing Up To Racism: <https://www.cmy.net.au/schools-standing-up-to-racism/>

QPASTT has collated a range of resources for educators and published on our website here: <https://qpastt.org.au/resources-for-educators/>

We warmly recommend the resources developed by our sister agencies in New South Wales ([STARTTS in Schools](#)) and Victoria ([Schools in for Refugees](#)).



What guiding principles or other elements could be helpful in developing a consistent national standard for responding to bullying?

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) published a [National Anti-Racism Framework](#) in 2024 after extensive national consultation and review. Eight of the 63 recommendations in the framework are actions for education and publish awareness. Seven of these recommendations are directly related to education sector as per below:

Recommendation 27: Australian governments fund a holistic cultural safety and anti-racism review of existing policies and practices that affect staff and students in primary and secondary schools, through consultation with children and young people. The findings must inform the development and implementation of cultural safety and anti-racism reforms.

Recommendation 28: Australian governments commission and fund comprehensive mandatory professional development for primary and secondary school staff (including leadership staff members) to build schools' capacity to identify, prevent, and manage incidents of racism and develop the skills, tools, and capability to have discussions about racism and its effects in contemporary Australia.

Recommendation 29: Australian governments and education providers (early childhood to tertiary) co-design and incorporate into curricula nationally consistent anti-racism resources and educational materials for staff and students that focus on recognising and rejecting racism:

- a. in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and practitioners, including material about the historical and ongoing impacts of settler colonisation. This should be supplemented by local, place-based materials
- b. in partnership with non-Indigenous antiracism experts from negatively racialised communities, including material about Australia's migration histories, contemporary forms of racism, and ongoing impacts of discriminatory policies.

Recommendation 30: Australian governments and education providers (early childhood to tertiary) implement curricula reform:

- a. in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and practitioners to embed First Nations knowledges, scholarship, and texts across all disciplines
- b. on the advice of other negatively racialised organisations and practitioners to better integrate knowledges, scholarship, and texts authored by non-Indigenous negatively racialised people

Recommendation 31: Australian governments and education providers (early childhood to tertiary) codesign with community experts, a nationally consistent, effective, comprehensive, and culturally safe mechanism for students, staff, families, and communities to safely and without fear of repercussions, report experiences of racism across educational settings and improve accountability, support, and redress services.

Recommendation 34: Australian governments increase funding for research to address gaps in existing research and contribute to the evidence base on the efficacy of anti-racism initiatives and interventions in education settings, including systemic reforms.

QPASTT endorses the adoption of the AHRC National Anti-Racism Framework.

