

NSW Curriculum Review 2018

White Ribbon Australia Submission, 30 November 2018

White Ribbon Australia is the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end men's violence against women. We focus on primary prevention: stopping violence before it starts. Through education, awareness-raising and creative campaigns, prevention programs and partnerships, we highlight the positive role men play in preventing men's violence against women, and enable them to be part of this social change.

Diversity and inclusion are in the forefront of White Ribbon social change movement. White Ribbon engages with all communities including multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to prevent violence against women.

The issue of domestic and family violence is widespread across NSW and Australia, and the impacts are felt from the start. For instance, "people who, as children, witnessed partner violence against their parents were 2–4 times as likely to experience partner violence themselves (as adults) as people who had not (ABS 2017b)"¹. Children's rights should be guaranteed to ensure all children can develop to their full potential². If children and young people are to build the skills necessary to live safe and respectful lives, then Respectful Relationships Education cannot be an "opt in" for schools, it must be central to the NSW Curriculum. White Ribbon Australia implores the NSW Government to support all schools to implement Respectful Relationships Education as a central part of the NSW Curriculum, regardless of geographic location, socioeconomic status, and demographic backgrounds of students.

We thank NESA for the opportunity to contribute to the NSW Curriculum Review and welcome further discussion with you regarding our submission.

What knowledge, skills and attributes should every student develop at school?

Respectful relationships and learning across the curriculum

It is vital that every student develop knowledge, skills and attributes that support them to foster respectful relationships throughout their life course. Respectful relationships are "relationships that demonstrate nonviolence, equality, mutual respect and trust."³ White Ribbon Australia believes that Respectful Relationships Education is critical in providing "essential knowledge, capabilities and values ... to be flourishing and contributing citizens"⁴.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018*. Cat. no. FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW. Available: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/contents/table-of-contents>

² UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3. Available: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html>

³ Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (2018) *Key Terms in respectful relationships education*, p 3. Available: <https://www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/prevention/key-terms-respectful-relationships-education>

⁴ NSW Education Standards Authority (2018) *Terms of Reference – NSW Curriculum Review*, p. 1, Available: <https://www.nswcurriculumreview.nesa.nsw.edu.au/assets/docs/nsw-curriculum-review-terms-of-reference.pdf>

Essential knowledge and skills related to respectful relationships include but are not limited to⁵:

- understanding the concepts of gender, relationships and respect
- understanding the gendered drivers of violence
- understanding power and control AND/OR understanding the links between gender, power, and violence
- identifying and understanding the impact of forms of harassment, abuse, and violence
- critical literacy (eg media, unpacking gender stereotypes and gender inequality)
- effective and respectful communication skills (eg empathy, negotiation, social and emotional learning)
- informed consent, rights and responsibilities
- ethical decision making
- active bystander skills.

Respectful Relationships Education, and the skills children need to have respectful relationships, must be central components in the curriculum, as they are essential for the world we live in.

Respectful relationships education is primary prevention work undertaken in education and care settings to address the drivers of violence against women. It involves taking a holistic, whole school approach, which sees schools as both education institutions and workplaces, to create a future free from gender-based violence⁶.

States and territories across Australia have been implementing Respectful Relationships Education over the last decade, and it is time for the NSW Department of Education to ensure all students across NSW are accessing the same quality curriculum⁷. In light of the NSW Curriculum Review, now is a timely opportunity to strengthen the existing curriculum and further embed Respectful Relationships Education for NSW schools.

The NSW Curriculum currently includes respectful relationships in the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education K-10 Syllabus 2018. White Ribbon Australia advocates for this to remain following the Curriculum Review. For instance, there are number of clear opportunities for teachers and students to engage in activities to discuss the causes and impacts and prevention of domestic

⁵ See Our Watch's [Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit](#) for steps that schools can take to implement an effective whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education, and the VIC Department of Education and Training Health and Physical Education "[Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships](#)" for curriculum examples.

⁶ DVCRV (2018), p. 3

⁷ Departments of Education in Victoria, Queensland, Australian Capital Territory, and Tasmania have been implementing curriculum for primary and secondary schools over the last decade, and the Western Australian Government has committed funding to deliver Respectful Relationships Education in 2019. For further information, please see the respective Departments of Education websites:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/pages/respectfulrelationships.aspx>

<https://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/school-curriculum/respectful-relationships>

https://www.education.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/respectful-relationships-education

<https://respectfulrelationships.education.tas.gov.au/>

and family violence in its Healthy, Safe and Active Lifestyles.

There are further opportunities to embed learning *across Stages* within General Capabilities including ethical understanding, information and communication technology capability, intercultural understanding, and personal and social capability. The application of respectful relationships across the curriculum can also support literacy (for instance in texts that address drivers of violence against women) and numeracy (eg when learning about statistics on the percentage of women in leadership positions, domestic and family violence statistics etc.). In addition, Respectful Relationships Education aligns with the NESA syllabus inclusion of Civics and citizenship and Difference and diversity as important learning for all students.

Given the Review will also explore the issue of overcrowding, it is vital to retain Respectful Relationships Education and support its delivery by integrating learning across the curriculum and General Capabilities. This enables teachers to integrate into existing content, while supporting student social and emotional learning (eg Respectful Relationships Education also aligns with the NSW Wellbeing Framework for Schools under “Connect”, “Thrive”, and “Enabling School Environment”⁸). It can be integrated into the classroom and it must be implemented across every school.

Schools that have participated in White Ribbon Australia’s *Breaking the Silence* Program aim to embed violence prevention philosophies across the curriculum (eg see Case Study).

Case Study 1

A School for Specific Purposes in Urban NSW is a recognised White Ribbon School that has integrated Respectful Relationships Education across the curriculum. Students learn about different types of violence (including domestic violence) and link with General Capabilities and positive upstanding, for instance during “White Ribbon Wednesdays” across the school year. They deliver theme-based workshops engaging students in visual and performing arts, while also addressing gender stereotypes and inequality in subjects including horticulture, science, and PDHPE. All curriculum is underpinned by the School’s commitment to trauma informed approaches. These activities, including a focus on whole-school engagement, has been positively received by and inspirational for students.

“We noticed a huge shift in the culture because our White Ribbon program looks like many different things. It’s involved in art, it’s involved in sport, it’s involved in music, it’s involved in our literacy.” – Teacher

“I have noticed a considerable improvement around the school, people being aware of the situations and personally taking their own time and their own effort to, you know, just think for a minute and to understand the consequences.” – Male student

⁸ NSW Department of Education and Communities (2015) *The Wellbeing Framework for Schools*. Available: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/wellbeing/about/16531_Wellbeing-Framework-for-schools_Accessible.pdf

Recommendations:

1. Retain content across stages relating to respectful relationships education and prevention of domestic and family violence in the PDHPE curriculum.
2. Expand learning of respectful relationships across the curriculum.

How could the curriculum better support every student's learning?

Implementation of learning across the curriculum

White Ribbon Australia acknowledges that the incoming PDHPE curriculum includes Respectful Relationships Education. What is vital is how schools will be supported to implement curriculum within PDHPE and across learning areas. Our experience working with 449 schools in NSW since 2009 shows that:

- schools with access to training and support can deliver Respectful Relationships Education and can do it well
- schools in regional and remote areas with less access to face-to-face training and complex needs require ongoing support⁹
- the rollout of Respectful Relationships Education can depend on passionate individuals, some of whom deliver curriculum within their individual classrooms; even where Respectful Relationships Education is rolled out through a whole of school approach by passionate Principals and teams, it can often mean that students down the road miss out.

Even though building respectful relationships is core to young people living positive and safe lives, and is key to the prevention of violence against women, it is currently not a core part of the curriculum, but an opt in. As a result, it does not receive the same attention nor application across the state, leaving students missing out on this vital part of their education.

White Ribbon Australia implores the NSW Government to support all schools to implement Respectful Relationships Education as a central part of the NSW Curriculum, regardless of geographic location, socioeconomic status, and demographic backgrounds of students. Parity of access to Respectful Relationships Education means including students in Special Education and Life Skills, Aboriginal education, and students learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). When implementing curriculum within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school communities, prevention work requires meaningful engagement with local community that is guided by key principals including cultural safety, trauma-informed practice, healing focused and strengths based approaches.¹⁰

⁹ Regional schools have specific requirements, and staff from schools in more remote locations can feel 'isolated' when implementing Respectful Relationships Education. For instance, a number of smaller schools in Northern NSW experienced challenges to implementing the Breaking the Silence Schools Program, including inability to attend face-to-face professional learning and turnover of Principals or staff to drive initiatives.

¹⁰ Our Watch (n.d.), *Changing the picture: Executive Summary*, p. 6. Available: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/482aa696-e666-485a-9d0f-6f91bb981a3b/Changing-the-picture-exec-summary-AA.pdf.aspx>

Given the wide reaching impact of violence against women amongst students and families, a whole of school approach that engages communities can support every student's learning. As outlined in the previous PDHPE teacher toolkit for implementing content relating to the prevention of domestic violence, "respectful relationships and violence education is the responsibility of the whole school community and is most effective as part of a whole-school approach."¹¹ The incoming PDHPE curriculum also highlights providing health, safety, wellbeing and physical activity needs of all students as a "shared responsibility" part of a whole-school approach. Relegating Respectful Relationships Education does not stress its importance or essential knowledge for students. Rather, integrating learning across the curriculum with an emphasis on a whole of school approach can prepare each student with strong foundations of knowledge, capabilities and values to be lifelong learners and live healthy and safe lives (eg see Case Study 2).

Case Study 2

A central western regional NSW co-educational government high school became involved in the *Breaking the Silence* Schools Program because of the prevalence of violence against women in the community and its impact on students:

"I see it as very important because [local area] has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in NSW, so it's an issue. Like our kids are coming to school and we know that there's domestic violence in a lot of their homes, so obviously it's a very important issue." - Teacher

The School has adopted a whole-school approach to implementing Respectful Relationships Education, which started with a focus on student wellbeing and linked to the development of positive relationships across the school among students and staff. It has since been integrated into their Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) program, within the PDHPE curriculum (eg lessons each semester delivered across the whole school), and student leadership programs including the White Ribbon Boys Advocates group with year 8 to 12 students. This initiative provided training about family and domestic violence, healthy relationships, and opportunities for project based learning.

The School has also played a leading role engaging the local community, including organising the annual White Ribbon march and running an White Ribbon rugby league game between schools teams from the two major local towns in the area. Staging the game is part of the school's efforts to raise awareness in the local communities, and attendance has grown from a few hundred spectators in the first year (2013) to more than two thousand in 2018.

¹¹ Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (2015) *PDHPE teacher toolkit for implementing content relating to the prevention of domestic violence*, p. 8. Available: <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/20b46bd0-8f56-4d34-ba6f-864dc6854bcc/PDHPE-teacher-toolkit-prevention-domestic-violence.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID>

Ongoing and accessible professional learning to support curriculum delivery for Respectful Relationships Education

Adequate and accessible professional learning is vital to supporting curriculum implementation throughout NSW. Our experience has shown that while aspects of Respectful Relationships Education are referenced in the curriculum, it is not implemented across all schools. The success of the *Breaking the Silence* program is that it supports what teachers are already required to do but strengthens their capacity to deliver it, including across the curriculum and through a whole of school approach. Professional learning workshops, for instance, have been valuable opportunities for educators to discuss, reflect, and share knowledge and practical examples of how to embed respectful relationships in the curriculum.¹² Schools are also connected to local, regional, state and national networks of educators, with access to case studies and educational resources.

The then Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW also supported the “PDHPE teacher toolkit for implementing content relating to the prevention of domestic violence” with a series of professional learning workshops at the PDHPE Teachers Association annual conference in 2015¹³. A number of schools as a result had used the materials in their classrooms in the following year¹⁴.

Interstate, the Victorian Government has dedicated funding as part of rolling out their Respectful Relationships curriculum, which includes Department of Education staff supporting leading schools with professional development and whole-school approach implementation¹⁵. A range of professional learning opportunities is available to school staff, delivered at the local area level and tailored for school contexts¹⁶. In Tasmania, the Department of Education has provided online professional learning, state-wide face-to-face workshops, and targeted professional learning to support whole-school implementation of Respectful Relationships Education¹⁷.

The NSW Government needs to support schools with adequate, accessible professional learning. This will provide vital support to effectively deliver the NSW Curriculum. Well-designed teacher training includes¹⁸:

¹² University of Technology Sydney (2018) *Evaluation of the Breaking the Silence Schools Program*, Draft Report, UTS prepared for White Ribbon Australia.

¹³ Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (2015) “Amendments to the 7-10 PDHPE syllabus: Domestic violence”, *BOSTES NSW*. Available: <https://news.bostes.nsw.edu.au/blog/2015/8/7/Amendments-to-the-7-10-PDHPE-syllabus-domestic-violence>

¹⁴ Kerin, L. (2016) “Domestic violence prevention lessons to begin in NSW classrooms”, *ABC News*, 21 March, Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-21/domestic-violence-lessons-begin-in-nsw-classrooms/7262644>

¹⁵ VIC Department of Education and Training (2018) *Respectful Relationships leading and partner schools*, Available: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/capabilities/personal/Pages/respectfulrelschools.aspx>;

Victoria Department of Education and Training (2018), *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships*, Available: <http://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/ResourcePackage/LandingPage?ObjectId=0249f9d6-e536-4122-9298-dbd3d6b29808>

¹⁶ VIC DET (2018) *ibid*.

¹⁷ Tasmanian Department of Education (2018) “Professional Learning”, *Respectful Relationships Education*, Available: <https://respectfulrelationships.education.tas.gov.au/professional-learning/>

¹⁸ Our Watch (2015) *Overview: Our Watch Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit*, p. 12. Available: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/Respectful-relationships-education/Whole-School-Approach-Toolkit>; VIC DET (2018) *ibid*.

- age-appropriate curriculum guidance for all year levels covering several classroom sessions
- ongoing support for teachers and schools to respond effectively and appropriately to disclosures¹⁹
- trauma informed approaches
- pre-service training and in-service professional learning for teaching and non-teaching staff.

By supporting schools with adequate, accessible professional learning, the NSW Government will be providing vital support to effectively deliver of the NSW Curriculum.

Student voice

I feel like boys as well as girls are putting forward ... their opinions and working towards a greater sense of White Ribbon in the community. – Secondary School Student of White Ribbon School, Western NSW

I think it's important to talk about the effects of "Breaking the Silence" to spread awareness ... at school we have talked about it a lot, especially in the classrooms... A couple of weeks ago there was someone in the classroom who was saying rude things to me and then one of my friends, she goes: 'You can't talk to a girl like that.' – Secondary School Student of White Ribbon School, Sydney NSW²⁰

Children and young people are beneficiaries that must be involved in the implementation of the NSW Curriculum. White Ribbon Australia supports a whole of school approach that engages student voice in the rollout of Respectful Relationships Education²¹. Young people are aware of and want to talk about the issue of violence against women²². Students should be part of driving change in their schools rather than be passive recipients. This is key to ensuring they can access curriculum that meets their needs and supports them to be flourishing and contributing citizens.

¹⁹ Increased disclosures as a result of implementing whole school Respectful Relationships Education were reported by Kearney et al. (2016), who also identified that this was the area where school staff felt least confident to respond. Providing clear guidance that outlines the role that staff can play and also delineates the boundaries of their roles and the support that is available to them is therefore vital for building capacity amongst school staff to support students in this way (Mazzer & Rickwood, 2014).

²⁰ UTS (2018) p. 84, 114.

²¹ Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (n.d.) *Supporting a whole school approach*, Partners in Prevention Tip Sheet, p. 1. Available: http://www.partnersinprevention.org.au/wp-content/uploads/PiP-Tip-Sheet_Whole-School-Approach_FA.pdf

²² Flood, M. & Fergus, L. (2008) *An assault on our future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships*. White Ribbon Foundation, Sydney. Available: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/103828/>

Recommendations:

3. Support all schools to implement Respectful Relationships Education as a central part of the NSW Curriculum regardless of geographic location, socioeconomic status, and demographic backgrounds of students.
4. Support a whole of school approach to curriculum delivery.
5. Provide adequate, accessible pre-service and in-service teacher training to implement respectful relationships education across the curriculum.
6. Provide meaningful opportunities for student voice to inform the implementation of learning across the curriculum.

Conclusion

The NSW Government plays a pivotal role in supporting all schools across urban, regional and remote NSW to implement curriculum that develops student knowledge, skills and attributes that in respectful relationships. This submission makes a number of recommendations to embed Respectful Relationships Education and learning across the curriculum. This will ensure all children and young people can build essential knowledge, capabilities and values to be flourishing and contributing citizens.

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