



**CATHOLIC
EDUCATION**
MELBOURNE

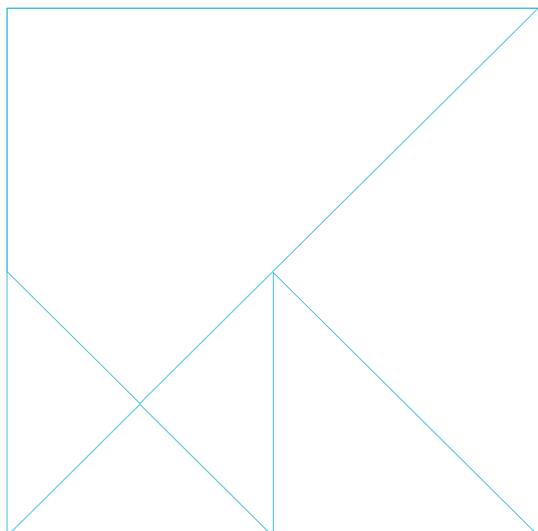
IDENTITY AND GROWTH

A Perspective for
Catholic Schools

Policy 2.30 |
Sexual
Orientation

We as a church affirm the dignity of all those who identify as having a same sex orientation. Like all human beings they are created in the image and likeness of God. They have a right to expect to be loved and welcomed and not subject to unjust discrimination.

(Most Rev. Denis Hart DD 2017)



1. Rationale

One of the fundamental duties of a school is to ensure that every student is kept safe and led into the fullness of life that God wants for each human person. We believe that every person is made in the image of God, and this belief expands our way of seeing the human person; we are all more than just one aspect of our identity and, therefore, no one can be reduced to a label. This is why the Church prefers not to consider the person as a 'heterosexual' or a 'homosexual' as she insists that every person has a fundamental identity: a creature of God, and by grace, a child and heir to eternal life (CDF 1986). Sexuality is a fundamental dimension of the human person. It profoundly affects feelings, self-image, communication with others, and the expressing and living out of love (CCC 2332).

This policy recognises that there are various sexual orientations and offers schools the necessary support in this sensitive area to deliver appropriate pastoral care so the Catholic school truly is a community where the innate, God-given dignity and uniqueness of every student is welcomed and respected. Within the mission and needs of the school community those experiencing same-sex attraction must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided (CCC 2358).

2. Definitions

Sexual orientation:

a person's physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual attraction to another person.

It is defined in the legislation as 'a person's sexual orientation towards:

- (a) persons of the same sex; or
- (b) persons of a different sex; or
- (c) persons of the same sex and persons of a different sex' (*Sex Discrimination Act 1984* [Cth] p. 8).

Heterosexual:

people who are attracted physically, emotionally, spiritually and sexually to people of the opposite sex.

Homosexual:

people who are attracted physically, emotionally, spiritually and sexually to people of the same sex.

Bisexual:

people who are attracted physically, emotionally, spiritually and sexually to people of the opposite and same sex.

3. Principles of decision making

Schools are to be governed by the following principles when implementing this policy:

- a. As parents are the primary carers and educators of their children the school should support and assist them in that role.
- b. Catholic schools should accompany, include and encourage growth towards wholeness in all students.
- c. Catholic schools should deliver sexuality programs that are age-appropriate and in accordance with the relevant Catholic teaching.
- d. Catholic schools should ensure that their programs and policies are evidence-based and formed by available research.
- e. Catholic schools must ensure they operate within the current legislative framework and all policies, protocols and procedures conform to the law.

4. Procedural considerations

In creating inclusive environments and communities of companionship and growth, schools should consider the following multi-faceted approach.

Accompany

- Professional learning and training in appropriate and relevant areas are provided for staff to enable the required competency, professionalism and sensitivity to work proficiently in this area.
- Students are encouraged and welcomed to share their journey of growth and development within the school setting. The role of staff is to provide a guiding presence to the students in their care, affirm all that is life giving and challenge aspects that are likely to harm or unfairly limit the student's development.
- The pastoral needs of students who are experiencing challenges related to their identity or sexual orientation need to be sensitively and confidentially addressed in partnership with the student, their parents/carers and relevant experts. Actions should include:
 - The development of a school management plan to ensure necessary educational adjustments are made so the student is not discriminated against, either directly or indirectly.
 - A management plan should clearly state expectations and identified strategies to assist the school to provide agreed pastoral and learning supports. Effective management plans contribute to building respectful relationships and resilience. This enables students to feel safe, valued and connected to

their school community so that they may effectively engage with their learning. Management plans assist schools to discharge their duty of care to students via appropriate planning.

- To facilitate access to confidential counselling services to students and their families and referrals to specialised agencies as required.
- Supporting the wellbeing, affirming the dignity and considering the needs of all students in the school community.
- Establishing exclusive support groups or withdrawal spaces for students that are questioning their sexual identity are not encouraged as these may prove counterproductive by isolating students from the mainstream student body. The research (Parkinson 2014) demonstrates that students experience better outcomes for their wellbeing when they remain connected to their peers, rather than being separated from them. The formation of groups which intentionally include students with particular needs is to be encouraged but not if they label students.

Include

- Encourage family connectedness as this has been shown to impact positively on the mental health of young people questioning their sexuality (Eisenberg & Resnick 2006; Society for Adolescent Health & Medicine 2013).
- Seek parental consent for all sexuality programs and encourage active involvement of the parents/carers.
- Safeguard age-appropriate education in human sexuality programs are culturally sensitive and inclusive.
- Focus on the use of inclusive language and challenge the use of discriminatory language within the school environment.
- Ensure out-of-hours school functions that offer the opportunity for students to bring a guest (i.e. school formals) are inclusive and welcoming.

The student may be a 'mature minor'

Catholic Education Melbourne recognises that parents and carers are significant and essential partners with schools in actively supporting and nurturing the educational and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people from early years through adolescence. For this reason, schools continue to engage parents in schooling matters even after the student has turned 18 and are legally recognised as adults.

Notwithstanding this, for a variety of reasons students under the age of 18 sometimes ask to make decisions on their own behalf, without involvement of their parents.

In such scenarios the principal should, in the first instance, seek advice from Catholic Education Melbourne's Legal Unit prior to determining whether a student is a 'mature minor'.



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5. Supports

Catholic Education Melbourne: Student Wellbeing Unit –
03 9267 0228

Catholic Education Melbourne: Legal Unit –
03 9267 0228

Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission –
educates people about the rights and responsibilities
contained in the Charter and reports annually to the
government about the operation of the Charter.

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

Lifeline 13 11 14

6. Resources

National Safe Schools Framework – provides Australian
schools with a vision and a set of guiding principles
that assist school communities to develop positive and
practical student safety and wellbeing policies.

Bully Stoppers – supports students, parents, teachers and
principals in working together to make sure schools are
safe and supportive places, where everyone is empowered
to help reduce the incidence of bullying.

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