



## Policy Paper: Racism in Education Institutions

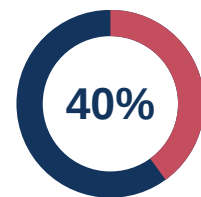
*“Racism is the process by which systems and policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2022). This includes all the laws, policies, ideologies and barriers that prevent people from experiencing justice, dignity, and equity because of their racial identity. Racism is a historic problem that has taken a particular form in hyper-diverse countries, including Australia, and it is widespread in Australia’s educational settings, according to the Report on Racism in Australian Schools, completed by Dr. John Bosco Ngendakurio (2024) in collaboration with ECCQ.*

### What’s the problem?

Racism and racial biases lead to adverse educational experiences and poor academic outcomes for students of colour, in public and private schools (McGown, 2019). Despite progress in recent decades, systemic racism persists within educational institutions, manifesting itself in various forms such as discrimination, segregation, oppression, microaggressions, and unequal access to opportunities (Baak, 2019, p. 128). In fact, 40% of non-white Australian students are victims of racial discrimination at any given time— racism has become a part of their everyday life (McGown, 2019).

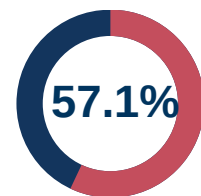
Non-white students also experience racism through micro-aggressions from both teachers, peers, society, as well as systemic exclusions based on Eurocentric curricular that excludes their experiences and preferences. Racism is often exacerbated by teachers’ lack of confidence, willingness, and competency regarding the issue, white normativity, colour- blindness and silencing (Yared, Christine & Chapman, 2020, p. 1506).

As informed by the Queensland Youth Strategy Consultation Discussion Paper (2022), the challenges associated with racism and discrimination continue to affect young peoples lives. Consequently, it is not surprising that young people from Queensland have ranked equity and discrimination as top three issues of national concern. Furthermore, 57.1% of young Queenslanders reported witnessing unfair treatment due to a person’s race or cultural background (Tiller, et. al. 2021).



**40%**  
of non-white Australian students in years five to nine, are victims of racial discrimination by their peers (McGown, 2019).

*“Racism and discrimination continue to affect our lives”*  
(QLD Youth Strategy Consultation Discussion Paper, 2022)



**57.1%**  
of young people from QLD reported witnessing unfair treatment due to a person’s race or cultural background (Tiller, et. al. 2021)



Moreover, young people from groups vulnerable to discrimination keep experiencing inequity and hardship to access much needed inclusive and tailored support and services. This has great impact in their experiences in education, home and the community and can result in significant mental health challenges (QLD Youth Strategy Consultation Discussion Paper, 2022).

The recently proposed consultation draft, 'Putting Queensland Kids First Package' (2024), further highlights that the experience of racism is a risk factor that requires safe and stable environments as protective means to prevent challenges compounding across the child's life and set them on a pathway to more positive life trajectories.

There are fragmented approaches to addressing systematic and inter-personal racism, which creates barriers for people to get fair and equitable treatment across all levels of society and attain meaningful employment. Many community leaders believe the school environment is a great place to start to address the critical issue of racism.

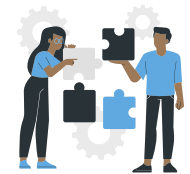
*"Racism within Australian schools remains a significant barrier to accessing, engaging, and succeeding in education"*  
(Gibbs, Paradies, Gee & Haslam 2022)



## What is the ask?

The Queensland Government needs to develop and implement a **whole-of-school anti-racism policy** to protect Queensland students. ECCQ recommends:

- The anti-racism policy would provide the framework to address racism in schools and, in particular, provide an effective means of detecting, understanding, and dismantling racially induced exclusions to enable schools to foster culturally inclusive environments. This would not only safeguard Queensland students but also empower staff to effectively support students facing such challenges.
- That racist incidents in schools are included as mandatory reportable incidents, and that schools have an identifiable staff member to whom students can report incidents of racism.
- That Queensland schools be encouraged to promote social cohesion and be responsible for safe and robust dialogue, making space for cultural learning and full participation.



## Case studies

As part of his research in collaboration with ECCQ to explore the impact of, and possible solutions to, racism within Australian schools, Dr. John Bosco Ngendakurio (2024) has recently conducted semi-structured interviews with former students of colour and their parents. These interviews, provided understanding of their views on how racism occurs, its impact and what can be done to reduce or eliminate it, from the victims' perspectives. Names of the interviewees have been changed for privacy and confidentiality.

This research is particularly important because it intends to contribute to the enhancement of Australian values, requiring all Australians to treat each other with dignity and respect, regardless of their race, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, heritage, culture, politics, wealth, or religion (Australian Government 2020).



Conversely, the key findings from Dr Ngendakurio's sample indicate that students of colour continue to experience unfair treatments and a range of oppressions by the school system, teachers, and peers, as Joe, a young man of Somali background who completed his primary and secondary school in Australia, puts it:

*"There was actually a time where I got in[to] a fight because this guy called me nigger and then I ended up fighting him, and they said to me, 'why did you fight him, and I said he called me the N-word. And they said, 'oh, okay', and then nothing happened from there. But I got a school suspension, and that kid got to go free."*

Noella, a second-generation Australian woman of Pakistani heritage, and former high school student, also talks about how racism deeply impacted her experience in school and academic performance:

*"I lost all motivation to go to school. Some days, I remember, I would use any excuses for not going to school because of how bad it was – how badly I didn't want to be there. Because almost every day or every second day, something racist was being said (...) I lost a lot of attendances in crucial classes, which definitely brought down my grades- crucial like exam times, I would not want to go. I missed a lot of studies in terms of preparation (...) that significantly brought down my grades".*

Mary is a 23-year-old woman of East African heritage born in Brisbane, explains that people, including teachers, were surprised she was smart:

*"I did well in school. So, there was an experience for me where racism was sort of a little bit more implicit (...) So, for example, people would always be surprised by the fact that I was smart, which I never thought was a bad thing, you know. But as I get older, I realised it is just because they expect like nothing from you, or they expect low of you (...) They expect you to be stupid".*

Joe describes a similar experience. When the interviewer asked him if his Somali background was a major barrier to his academic achievements, he gave one example, in a typically Australian accent:

*"I was born in Australia, and I was put into ESL (English as Second Language) classes even if I was born here, and I only speak English. So I felt that was very funny (...)."*



School staff that were interviewed, expressed feeling powerless when it comes to addressing racism towards students. Moreover, Jacki who is from Tonga, has worked in schools across Cairns for many years and in her experience racism is not addressed like other challenging issues within school environments, such as bullying and mental health.

*"(...) we frequently have a week of focussing on 'are you okay?'. I know it is about mental health, but in there, we also work on how to stop bullying (...) The subject of racism has never been brought up at school, and there is no awareness about racism".*

## Reference List

Australian Government (2020). Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond,

<<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/citizenship-subsite/files/our-common-bond-testable.pdf>>

Australian Human Rights Commission (2022). Racism, it stops with me.

<<https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/commit-to-learning>

Baak, M. (2019). Racism and othering for south Sudanese heritage students in Australian schools: is inclusion possible? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(2), 125–141.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1426052>

Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training, Youth Pocket Stats (2019-2020).

Accessed 17 November 2023 from <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/youth-justice/data>

Gibbs, J., Paradies, Y., Gee, G. & Haslam, N. (2022). The effects of Aboriginal tertiary students' perceived experiences of racism and of cultural resilience on educational engagement. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*. 51(2)

Queensland Government (2022) Queensland Youth Strategy Consultation Discussion Paper,

<[https://www.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/305931/qld-youth-general-discussion-paper.pdf](https://www.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/305931/qld-youth-general-discussion-paper.pdf)

Queensland Government (2024) Putting Queensland Kids First Consultation Draft

<[https://www.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0031/454468/consultation-draft-putting-queensland-kids-first.pdf](https://www.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/454468/consultation-draft-putting-queensland-kids-first.pdf)

McGown, M. (2019). Racism Study Finds One in Three School Students Are Victims of Discrimination. *The Guardian*, < <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/aug/27/racism-study-finds-one-in-three-school-students-are-victims-of-discrimination>

Ngendakurio, JB. (2024). Report: Racism in Australian Schools Impacts and Possible Solutions. ECCQ Reports, <<https://eccq.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Report-Racism-Within-Australian-Schools.pdf>

Tiller, E., Greenland, N., Christie, R., Kos, A., Brennan, N., & Di Nicola, K. (2021). Youth Survey Report 2021. Sydney, NSW: Mission Australia < <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/2087-mission-australia-youth-survey-report-2021/file>

Yared, H., Grové Christine, & Chapman, D. (2020). How does race play out in schools? a scoping review and thematic analysis of racial issues in Australian schools. *Social Psychology of Education : An International Journal*, 23(6), 1505–1538. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-020-09589-5>

