



Racism in Victorian schools – how to speak out and get support

Many people in Victoria experience racism in their everyday lives, and this includes students in schools. Various studies have confirmed that, and the Victorian Department of Education itself found that around 20% of all high school student have experienced racism at school.

Parents have shared with us numerous incidents where their children experienced racism from other students, and sometimes from school staff. Others told us how their children faced discrimination from teachers who view and treat them as less capable simply because of their skin colour or cultural background, which can limit their opportunities to take on leadership roles or realise their full academic potential.

There are many reasons why people find it hard to speak out against racism when it happens in schools. Many incidents of racism go unreported. Often children and their families receive no support; racism is not recognised as a persistent problem at school, and there is no accountability.

Speaking up against racism in schools can help change this. But what are your rights? What are the school's obligations and how can you report and seek support when your child experiences racism at school?

Legal rights and obligations for schools

The *Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010* **prohibits direct and indirect discrimination** because of someone's cultural background, skin colour or religion in various areas of public life, including schools. It also outlaws negative treatment of someone after they made a racism-related complaint.

All Victorian school principals have a '**positive duty**' by law to prevent racial discrimination and to respond appropriately when it occurs. If they don't, they can be held legally accountable (vicarious liability). The Victoria Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission can help address such concerns.

In 2025, the Department of Education, released an **anti-racism policy**, which applies to all public schools in the state. The policy requires public schools to take active and suitable measures to prevent racism and to 'manage and respond to all reported incidents of racism that occur in school' in a 'timely, proportionate, safe, and inclusive' way. This includes the requirement to 'reassure the student (or parent) that the school believes their report and that it will be taken seriously'. For more information go to <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/preventing-addressing-racism-schools/policy>

Reporting and support pathways

There are different ways to speak out, report and seek support after an incident of racism at school depending on the specific circumstances.

Ideally, the problem can be resolved within the school. If there is a school staff member you trust, speak to them first. This might be a teacher, wellbeing officer or any other staff. In *public* schools, you may also want to refer to the anti-racism policy, which obliges schools to respond appropriately to racism related complaints.



If you prefer **not to speak to school staff directly** (or if you are not happy with the school's response), there are a few other things you can do.

You can make a complaint to the **Department of Education** via its Report Racism hotline (on school days, 9am to 5pm; 1800 722 476) or via email: report.racism@education.vic.gov.au.

If you need an interpreter, call the National Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450.

If you live in or near the local government areas of Wyndham, Whittlesea, Casey, Greater Dandenong or Cardinia, you can contact your **local community-led anti-racism support network** (for contact details, go to: <https://antiracismvictoria.com.au/support-services/>). They provide a safe space to speak about your experiences and to jointly explore support and referral options. They may also assist you in contacting the school, the Department of Education or VEOHRC.

Note: School leadership is often more responsive when an external organisation raises an incident of racism.

You can contact the **Victoria Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)** to get more information and/or lodge a formal complaint, where you think the school may have engaged in discrimination itself or breached its legal obligations ('positive duty') to take measures to prevent and respond appropriately to racism.

You can contact VEOHRC via phone (1300 292 153; weekdays 10am to 2pm) or make a formal complaint via complaints@veohrc.vic.gov.au.

You can also report online using the Community Reporting Tool (anonymous reporting option): <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/get-help/community-reporting-tool/#frame1>

Regardless of where you report, remember the following:

- If it is an emergency, call the police on 000.
- Document the incident, for example, when and where it happened and what happened. Did anyone witness the incident? Do you have their names and contact details?
- Speak to someone you trust! Make sure you're safe, get support and don't stay silent.