

Responding to the Royal Commission: our diocesan commitment

This **BDSAC Briefs** has been prepared by the Ballarat Diocesan Schools Advisory Council (BDSAC) to assist School Advisory Councils (or their equivalent) in understanding more about the Report on the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission), its recommendations and the implications of these recommendations for Catholic education in the Diocese of Ballarat.

Background and Context

1. **The Final Report of the Royal Commission** was released on 15 December 2017. It consists of an executive summary and seventeen volumes. It details findings and eighty-five recommendations, including the development of a national strategy and Ten Child Safe Standards that every institution should adopt.
2. **Volume 13** specific to schools contains eight recommendations related to the implementation of the Ten child safe elements; supporting boarding schools; responding to complaints of children with harmful sexual behaviours; guidance for teachers and principals and teacher registration.
3. **The school recommendations** are strongly aligned with Victoria's Child Safe Standards and provide an opportunity for further coordinated practice to strengthen child safety cultures.
4. **Legislation and/or regulation** by the Victorian and Australian Governments in response to the Royal Commission recommendations may take some time to evolve. The BDSAC is committed to a proactive and reflective approach to discussing and addressing the relevant recommendations.

Key Recommendations for Education

Volume 6, Making institutions child safe, looks at the role community prevention could play in making communities and institutions child safe, the child safe standards that will make institutions safer for children, and how regulatory oversight and practice could be improved to facilitate the implementation of these standards in institutions. It also examines how to prevent and respond to online sexual abuse in institutions in order to create child safe online environments.

The Royal Commission's **Ten Child Safe Standards** are outlined at **Recommendation 6.5** and described in more detail elsewhere in the report. They are:

1. Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture
2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
3. Families and communities are informed and involved
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account
5. People working with children are suitable and supported
6. Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused
7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training
8. Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur
9. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved
10. Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.

Volume 7, *Improving institutional responding and reporting* outlines guidance for how institutions should handle complaints and the need for independent oversight of complaint handling by institutions.

Volume 8, *Recordkeeping and information sharing* makes recommendations to improve records and recordkeeping practices within institutions (including non-government schools) and information sharing between key agencies and institutions.

Volume 10, *Children with harmful sexual behaviours* discusses the nature and extent of children with harmful sexual behaviours (on the continuum from common sexual play through to very concerning sexual behaviour) and makes recommendations about improving prevention and increasing the range of interventions available for children with harmful sexual behaviours.

Volume 13, *Schools* examines what was learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in schools. The volume examines the nature and adequacy of institutional responses and draws out the contributing factors to child sexual abuse in schools. It makes recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring in schools and, where it does occur, to help ensure effective responses to that abuse.

Volume 16, *Religious institutions* examines what was learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in religious institutions and makes recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring in religious institutions and, where it does occur, to help ensure effective responses. It specifically recommends to the Catholic Church that the Bishop of each diocese in Australia should ensure that parish priests are not the employers of principals and teachers in Catholic schools.

How is Catholic education responding?

- Since Victorian schools have implemented the nine Child Safe Standards mandated by the Victorian Government's Ministerial Order #870, Catholic schools are already meeting most aspects of the Royal Commission Standards. All schools in the Diocese of Ballarat can expect to be audited against these standards as part of the BDSAC School Improvement Cycle.
- Volume 6 Standards 2 (children participate in decisions), 3 (families/community) and 8 (online environments) have been identified as areas for concentrated resourcing, training and discussion in the short to medium term so that these elements are more deeply embedded in the culture of our schools.
- The Truth, Justice and Healing Council (which assisted the Catholic Church with its participation in the Royal Commission) is preparing a comprehensive analysis of the report and in particular the recommendations that relate either generally or specifically to the Catholic Church. They expect to have this report finalised and provided to the Church leadership early in 2018.
- The Catholic Education Office Ballarat and the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria are working together to ensure that every element of the Royal Commission Report is examined thoroughly and that our response to each relevant recommendation is thoughtful and thorough.
- The BDSAC Governance Working Party is continuing to shape recommendations for the future governance of parish schools and these are being considered favourably by Bishop Bird and the Priests of the Diocese who administer schools.

What next?

1. School Advisory Councils are encouraged to become familiar with the ***Ten Child Safe Standards*** in Volume 6 and the recommendations for schools in Volume 13 of the report.
2. The BDSAC is already reviewing all policies to ensure they reflect the ten standards and the learning from various Royal Commission research reports.
3. The BDSAC will include elements of an ongoing response to the Royal Commission in strategic planning and system improvement for 2019-2021.