EQUITY MATTERS

Your questions answered

Q What behaviours are acceptable for me to deal with in my classroom?

A A teacher shouldn't feel ashamed in reporting concerning behaviours taking place in their classroom. While it can be tricky at times, we need to change the idea that 'If it doesn't break the skin, it's not worth reporting'. Teachers need to be more proactive, asking 'What can we do as a membership to support students more effectively?'

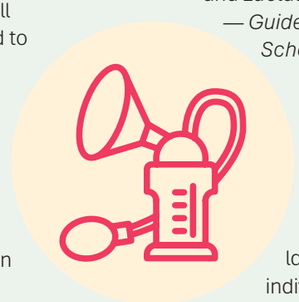
Is your school following proper reporting, suspension and expulsion procedures to meet the needs of students and staff in your school? If you're not sure, talk to your Federation Representative or Federation Workplace Committee and see what processes can be changed or updated. If there are still concerns, contact your Workplace Organiser.

Q I've heard the word inclusion used in lots of different contexts. What does it mean?

A It's a word that changes meaning often. Take a read of *JPL*'s article "Is Inclusion Truly Inclusive?" (Semester 2, 2025) to help start conversations in the staffroom and provide professional reflection on inclusion in your classroom, stage or school.

Q I'm getting ready to return to work after having a baby. What are my rights regarding lactation?

A Under state and federal legislation, there are protections for people who are still breastfeeding or need to express breast milk when they return to work. The provision for NSW public school teachers is for up to two paid 30-minute lactation breaks within a full working day to breastfeed or express breast milk. These breaks may align with student meal breaks.



Before you return to work, you should discuss with your principal your intention to use lactation breaks. The principal is required to support you for this to occur but also needs to balance the operational requirements of the school. Not everyone's routine will match school break or coverage times. For example, if covering your class or duty, you may need time to plan ahead.

Importantly, every effort must be made to provide access to suitable facilities to support breastfeeding. This includes a private, lockable, hygienic room with a power point, comfortable seating and facilities for convenient storage of breast pumps and related equipment. There must be facilities for washing hands and equipment. There should also be refrigeration for storage of breast milk. Unfortunately, the design of most schools means these may not be all be in the same room. It is important to discuss what is needed, particularly to ensure that there is clear "In Use" signage for privacy and that cleaning and storage facilities are close by.

Refer to *Determination 3 of 2011 — Lactation Breaks* and *Breastfeeding* and *Lactation Breaks in Schools — Guidelines for Principals and School Staff* (2019) if needed.

Q I'm worried about saying the wrong thing. How do I talk about disability?

A Generally, it is best to use 'person-first' language when talking to individuals with a disability, especially in the first instance. However, there are some groups or individuals that prefer 'disability-first' or 'identity-first' language. When in doubt, talk to the individual (or parent/carer), get to know them and ask how they would like to be spoken to.

Q I am a relieving principal and there has been some anti-LGBTIQA+ sentiment after Mardi Gras. What resources can I access to help respond to parents and broader community?

A The Department of Education has a toolkit, 'Supporting LGBTQIA+ communities in schools', designed to help principals and school leaders take positive action to respond to sentiment that may compromise safe, inclusive and respectful environments for all students and staff.

While this toolkit can be used to respond to any sentiment or concerns relating to any topic that may compromise safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments, the focus is on responding to sentiment about gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

Q I need to attend Sorry Business. Is there any leave that I can take?

A As stated in the *Teachers Award Update 2024*, family and community service leave of up to two days per occasion will be granted as an entitlement, and cannot be declined, where the teacher is seeking additional leave on the death of a family member for the purposes of Aboriginal kinship, in accordance with family and community service (FACS) leave provisions.

Q Our school celebrates Harmony Day (21 March), but I have also heard the term International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. What is the difference? Are there any suggestions for engaging in meaningful anti-racism?

A While they share the same day, Harmony Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination share two different meanings. While Harmony Day focuses on inclusivity, respect and cultural diversity, the latter aims to drive home the need for combatting systemic racial discrimination.

Critics argue that Harmony Week (16–22 March) shows how language can be used to reframe anti-racism and how the word 'harmony' can operate to reinforce inequality and maintain the status quo.

We all have a responsibility to call racism out and to interrogate the various ways it operates. No matter where you are in your individual anti-racism journey, the It Stops With Me website can help you learn more about racism and take meaningful action to create change.

We've also put together a list of suggested readings about the history of Harmony Day and the original intention of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which acknowledges the reality and harms of racism and strategising for change. You can find it within the Member Portal.

Q I'm new to special education. What documents do I need for my students?

A The Department's 'Strengthening planning for students' page provides templates for use to assist in your programming and planning for individual student needs. These documents can assist you to streamline your information and help others knowing how to engage with and work with students.

Please note: The Health Support Plan is mandatory.

REFERENCES

- "Is Inclusion Truly Inclusive?"
- Determination 3 of 2011 — Lactation Breaks
- Breastfeeding and Lactation Breaks in Schools — Guidelines for Principals and School Staff (2019)
- Supporting LGBTQIA+ communities in schools
- Teachers Award Update — Member Portal
- It Stops With Me
- International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination — Member Portal
- Strengthening planning for students

Links to the reference documents

Questions answered by Federation's Equity Team:

- Russell Honnery, Aboriginal Education Officer
- John Skene, Disability Officer
- Mandy Wells, Multicultural Officer
- Leeanda Smith, Women's Officer
- Mel Smith, Officer attached to LGBTIQA+ matters