



HOSPITALITY

Guidelines for Catholic Schools
Supporting Gender Diverse Students.



*As partners in
Catholic education
and open to God's presence,
we pursue fullness of life for all.*

I am made in the image of God. I want other people to understand that he made me the way I am. If he didn't want me to be me, he would have made me differently.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

Celebrating diversity is important because everyone deserves to be represented, and to know that they are valid, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

As a principal, guidelines such as this provide clarity in what steps might be taken to support students, families and staff as we navigate through a process to support students who are experiencing gender incongruence or who wish to affirm their gender.

It will prove a valuable resource and will make the path clearer for all involved. The concept of accompaniment and that we walk alongside in the process is central to success. Also, what I appreciate is that it recognises that formation for staff is crucial.

Principal - Primary
Diocese of Ballarat

The home and school environments both strongly influence a child's development. I will forever be grateful that the school actively helped my son to affirm his gender and live as his authentic self. He is now a thriving, confident child who enjoys attending school.

Primary School Parent
Diocese of Ballarat.

I imagine a future where people won't have to 'come out', it will be normal . . . like you wouldn't come out straight . . . I want a future where it is just safe to be YOU!

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

My message to my school community is 'don't be homophobic, transphobic or queerphobic. People are people and love is love.'

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

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I am excited and humbled to read the hospitality guidelines, they affirmed the work of our College, but provide even greater clarity and challenge for our growth. Hospitality and inclusion are about empowerment, voice and agency. At the heart of our Catholic Schools is the face of our God behind every community member.

Principal - Secondary
Diocese of Ballarat.



The modern Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes at Tabgha,¹ is situated on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel.

The modern Church is famous for being home to many of the oldest mosaics depicting Christian symbols in the Holy Land. One of these mosaics is that of the Loaves and Fishes located at the foot of the altar. This mosaic is depicting the Gospel story of Jesus feeding the Five Thousand (Mt 14:13–21; Mk 6:30–44; Lk 9:10–17; Jn 6:1–14). This miraculous act of hospitality is an expression of God's merciful love and compassion.

If you look closely at the image, you will see that it depicts only four loaves and not five. For some, the fifth loaf is the 'living bread' – Jesus - who gives life to the world. For others, the fifth loaf of bread is whatever is offered in loving and compassionate hospitality to others

Catholic schools are invited to be like Jesus in offering the gift of loving hospitality to all people, whoever the person may be, everywhere and always.

Celebrating diversity is important as it is a visible action of inclusivity and living out the Gospels. St Mary of the Cross MacKillop once said, "We must teach more by example than by word".

Principal - Secondary
Diocese of Ballarat.

¹ "Tabgha" by Seetheholyland.net is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/). This is an excerpt of the original.

Rationale for Guidelines:

This resource was developed as a practical tool for schools and their leadership teams to support students within their school community who are who wish to affirm their gender. It is recommended that this resource is used alongside the Australian Catholic Bishops statement “[Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender.](#)”



Hospitality and the ‘love of stranger’ was a very important part of Jesus’ life and ministry. On many occasions, Jesus was the welcoming host who ate with those who were considered outsiders by society. This concrete act of hospitality, an expression of love, mirrors God who is the ultimate host. Jesus welcomed the ‘other’ to join him at the table and these actions embodies the Kingdom where there is no division nor discrimination.

True hospitality transcends the alienation that arises from fear. Rather than being erased or rejected, the difference is confronted and affirmed. Hospitality must be open and receptive bridging the gaps that reinforce differences. Consequently, authentic hospitality recognizes and embraces everyone and no one is made to feel less honoured or less valued.

A fundamental belief of all Catholic moral and social teachings is that each person is made in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, their dignity must always be honoured. Every person is valued and, by drawing upon their own unique gifts, they all have an equal contribution to make to the building of the Kingdom of God.

This understanding of hospitality underpins these guidelines for Catholic schools as they support gender diverse students or those who wish to affirm their gender. Our diocesan vision reminds all schools to “pursue fullness of life for all’ and, therefore, provide opportunities for all students to reach their potential.

Hospitality is:

Showing God’s love to all’

A preferential option for the ‘guest’

Being open and receptive to all

Promoting right relationships

Making life better for those in need²

The Gospel message that Catholic schools seek to proclaim invites every member of the community to welcome and not alienate the other. In showing God’s love to the other, Catholic schools are called to unequivocally welcome gender diverse students and accompany them as one made in the image and likeness of God.

The Christian ethic of hospitality requires listening and dialogue. These guidelines provide a way of offering such hospitality to gender diverse students, their families and friends. Through first listening to dialogue, these guidelines can help to build greater connections, and therefore trust, between all individuals involved, leading to a better understanding and discernment of a way forward that honours the dignity of all.

² Arlene Scott, “A Spirituality of Hospitality,” in *Voices in Mission* quoted in Greg Elsdon, *Messages of Hope*, Adelaide: Pilgrim Uniting Church, 2019, <https://www.pilgrim.org.au/blog/?p=1657>

Catholic Social Teaching³

The Catholic Social Teaching principles of solidarity, participation and subsidiarity form a very good basis for all interactions and encounters within in a Catholic school. In relation to gender diverse students these principles can be interpreted as:

- **Solidarity:** this principle is demonstrated by colleagues in the school working together to accompany the gender diverse student and their family.
- **Participation:** is realised in the daily experience of school leaders fostering a spirit of inclusive involvement, always looking to find new ways to address problems responsibly and encourage open communication with all affected parties.
- **Subsidiarity:** is a crucial component in the Catholic school on gender issues. This principle protects the freedom and responsibility of the Catholic school to be the steward of the relationship with the gender diverse student in their local context. That relationship is not primarily directed by policies and protocols or governed from afar; rather it is managed first and foremost by the individuals encountered in the school community who show patience, charity and wisdom in their everyday, loving human interactions.

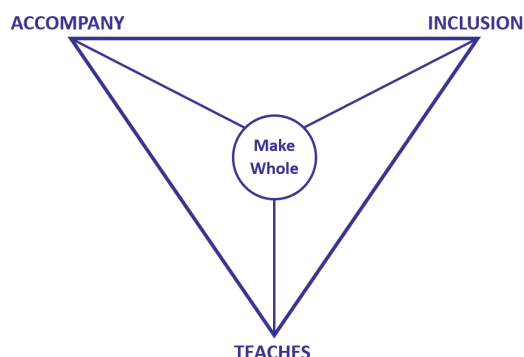
A Suggested Approach

Engaging in issues related to gender and sexuality can be complex and difficult to navigate a way forward. This resource applies the biopsychosocial approach to gender diverse students as recommended in the Australian Catholic Bishops statement “*Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender.*”

As well as caring for the gender diverse student, there may also be the need to minister to the student’s family and friends, as well as the staff and the broader school community. This resource proposes Jesus’ pedagogical approach, which aligns with the biopsychosocial approach, as a way of proceeding with love and compassion.

Jesus’ pedagogical approach⁴ followed three steps and it was through this approach that Jesus invited, engaged and proposed a vision for living a fullness of life. His three steps were:

- a) **Accompaniment:** Jesus had a personal presence and he genuinely cared about the other person. He walked with the person through the ambiguity and complexity of a situation.
- b) **Inclusion:** Jesus developed a relationship with and was inclusive of those he met, and the wider community. This is the cultural task.
- c) **Teaches:** Jesus proposed a vision that there is a different way to live for living a fullness of life.



³ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender*, (Canberra: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2022), p. 6.

⁴ Joseph Parkinson, “Presentation for the resource Identity and Growth: A perspective for Catholic schools,” (lecture, Catholic Leadership Centre, Melbourne, Vic, August 13, 2018).

For a Catholic school with a gender diverse student, this approach proposes:

ACCOMPANIMENT	This movement naturally involves walking alongside the student, but it may also include the student's family and friends, as well as staff and the wider school community. It is important to understand the needs of different parties involved who may need various degrees of nurturing and support as they grapple with the complexity of the context and lived reality.
INCLUSION	This movement involves developing relationships of love and care, respecting the dignity of all people involved. It is important to dialogue with the student and the student's family in order to gain an understanding of their context and lived reality. These safe and trusting relationships include open and honest communication. The privacy and confidentiality of the student must always be respected.
TEACHES	This movement involves making a commitment to the development of the whole person – spiritually, emotionally, socially, intellectually and physically. This step proposes a way of living for the fullness of life for the student. It also includes ensuring practical steps are taken and processes are put into place that provide the opportunity for the fullness of life for all involved parties.

"In this matter, as in all associated with Catholic education, we can do no better than to extend into every moment of every day the healing love of Jesus, who came that we all might 'have life, and have it to the full.'"⁵

Celebrating diversity is important because we want people to be proud of who they are and not have to hide it from anyone.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

I deserve to not have to worry about going to classes I like because I'm worried about having to hear people I don't know even talk to, talking about me.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

I enjoyed school so much more once I was able to be myself. Now I can relax and just be me.

Primary school student
Diocese of Ballarat

⁵ Joseph Parkinson, "Preparing Catholic Schools to Care for Gender Dysphoric Students," (unpublished manuscript, 2017), 26, retrieved from <https://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/ReligiousEducation.aspx?id=8589945160>

Curriculum and Professional Learning

The following curriculum areas will need to be carefully reviewed to ensure a consistent message is delivered. It is important that they all reflect the Christian understanding of the human person and use a shared understanding and language. They should also help students to learn and grow, excel and flourish as they “pursue fullness of life.”

- Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Health and Physical Education
- Respectful Relationships
- Pastoral Care programs
- Other curriculum areas where appropriate

To ensure that the professional learning being offered in schools is accurate, current and aligned with Church teachings, please contact the following at Catholic Education Ballarat:

- a) Wellbeing Team (e.g. Health & Medical, Government Legislation, Workplace issues)
- b) Catholic Identity and Mission Team (e.g. Christian Anthropology, Human Flourishing, Human Dignity)
- c) The following links provide access to a range of short films by Rev Dr Joseph Parkinson. Each webinar lasts approximately 7- 8 minutes and is supported by reflective questions which can be used to guide staff discussions and professional learning sessions.

- [Introduction](#)
- [The Mission of the Catholic School](#)
- [Reflective Questions and Discussion Guide](#)

- [The Jesus Model](#)
- [Catholic Understanding of the Human Person](#)
- [Reflective Questions and Discussion Guide](#)

- [Catholic Understanding of Human Sexuality](#)
- [Reflective Questions and Discussion Guide](#)

- [The power of language and labels](#)
- [Gender Variance](#)
- [Reflective Questions and Discussion Guide](#)

- [Gender Fluidity](#)
- [Gender Dysphoria - A whole school approach](#)

I deserve to be able to just be me without harassment and fear of existing.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

Celebrating diversity is important as it helps create an inclusive culture and reduces stigma and discrimination within our school community. Inclusivity can improve student's mental health and in turn, provide them with the opportunity to flourish in a welcoming environment.

Director of Wellbeing
Secondary

Principal Checklist

Education of the whole person.
Witness to the love of God.
Offer hospitality



COMMUNITY OF FAITH

Government Legislation,
DOBCEL Policies,
Health and medical data,
School policies,



LEGISLATION

PRINCIPAL CHECKLIST

Professional Learning
for staff including:
Gender Incongruence/Dysphoria
Authentic human flourishing,
Christian anthropology
Workplace behaviours
Human Dignity



FORMATION

Be open and truthful with school
community,
Respect privacy & confidentiality,
Develop a shared language,
Use correct terminology



COMMUNICATION

Safe and trusting relationships
Be supportive and nurturing
Know the challenges,
Respond to transphobia
Build inclusivity



ENVIRONMENT

Formation

Provide Professional Learning for your Staff

- Ensure that your team knows where to draw the line in terms of acceptable/not acceptable workplace behaviours.
- Reference changes within the Sex Discrimination Act to emphasise the importance of addressing destructive behaviours, within the team and external to it.
- Eliminate concerns of those with cultural backgrounds (behaviour focus, not forcing value /cultural change).
- Contact CEB for further information regarding possible providers in your local area.

Community of Faith

Hospitality

- Authentic hospitality is an expression of God's love.
- As a Christ centred community, we follow Jesus' example of welcoming the Other.
- The Gospel message proclaimed by the school requires all members of the school community to promote the common good for the development of inclusive communities.

Legislation

Know the Law

- Know that it is unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status; directly or indirectly. *Equal Opportunity Act 2010, Sex Discrimination Act 1984.*
- School's commitment to Ministerial Order 1359 represented by the Victorian Child Safe Standards.
- Understand that employers are liable for the behaviour of their employees and agents.
- Zero tolerance of homophobic / transphobic behaviours.

Know your Policies

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Diversity and Equity Policy
- Student Empowerment and Participation Policy
- Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy

Be Familiar with Catholic Education Ballarat Inclusion Practices

- Be informed by the documents:
 - * Actioning Education for All: A Guide for a Whole of System Approach to Inclusive Practices for Catholic Education Ballarat.
 - * DOBCEL Student Wellbeing Framework
- Determine how you might both promote and support diversity and inclusion within your school.

I look forward to the day when gender interesting people are regarded not as 'other' or 'stranger' but as family.

Priest
Diocese of Ballarat

Communication

Respect Confidentiality and Sensitivities

- Understand the sensitivities around disclosure and provide support.
- Seek permission before disclosing on behalf of somebody else unless you know that they are fine with this.
- Know that it is often a big deal if someone discloses.
- Be visible in your support so that if people don't want to disclose, they still know that you're inclusive.

Share your understanding

- Respond to questions or related commentary in a way that will both educate and inform.
- Correct misunderstandings and address the negative use of stereotypes.
- Take a stand for inclusion amidst any opposition.
- Be informed by Church teachings that promote the human dignity of each person.

Understand the Terminology

- Know your terminology: what's offensive, what's not.
- Understand commonly used terms.
- Understand the difference between Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Orientation.

Be Mindful of your own Assumptions and Language

- Try to adopt the habit of not assuming everyone is heterosexual.
- Use the word partner instead of husband/wife if you are unsure.
- Catch yourself reverting to stereotypes or bias and make an effort to change this.
- As all people are created in the image of God, no one is to feel less respected nor their dignity dishonoured.

Environment

Get to Know the challenges

- Fully appreciate inclusion initiatives by getting to know the challenges that LGBTQI people face.
- Be willing to engage in dialogue.
- Read this document - regularly.

Respond to Homophobia/Transphobia

- Respond quickly to homophobia and transphobia within the school.
- Have a zero tolerance for non-inclusive behaviours, including constant innuendo, jokes or commentary on one's sexual orientation, gender identity, expression or intersex status.
- Address destructive behaviour quickly.

Create an Inclusive School Community

- Be active and visible in your support of inclusion using a whole school approach.
- Discussion with the leadership and/or wider school community regarding inclusion initiatives or diversity events to be supported in your school.
- Display visible support for diversity and inclusion in your office or on your desk.

Inclusion for me means not being ignored or avoided for things you can't control.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

Useful Statements from Church Documents and other Sources

Vatican Documents – Pope Francis

For God, you have worth; you are not insignificant. You are important to him, for you are the work of his hands. That is why he is concerned about you and looks to you with affection.

Christus Vivit, 2019, para. 115

We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence.

Amoris Lætitia, 2016, para.250

Congregation for Catholic Education

Pope Francis provided three fundamental guidelines to help dialogue, “the duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others, the courage to accept differences, and sincerity of intentions.

The Identity of The Catholic School for A Culture of Dialogue
25 January 2022, para 30.

The courage to accept differences, because those who are different, either culturally or religiously, should not be seen or treated as enemies, but rather welcomed as fellow-travellers, in the genuine conviction that the good of each resides in the good of all.

The Identity of The Catholic School for A Culture of Dialogue
25 January 2022, para 30.

Another reason for conflicting interpretations is represented by the “narrow” Catholic school model. In such schools there is no room for those who are not “totally” Catholic. This approach contradicts the vision of an “open” Catholic school that intends to apply to the educational sphere the model of a “Church which goes forth,” in dialogue with everyone.

The Identity of The Catholic School for A Culture of Dialogue
25 January 2022, para 72.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Each life is a gift with an inherent purpose and meaning which is to be discovered and celebrated.

Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender
2022, p.5.

The extraordinary beauty of creation, each unique human person, male or female, is to be received and appreciated, protected and nourished, respected and cherished.

Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender
2022, p.9.

Christians are committed to respecting the dignity of every individual. No human person is to be diminished or devalued, and all have an indispensable part to play in the human community regardless of differences.

Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender

2022, p.9.

This Christian anthropology has important implications for what it means to respond in truth and love to one another. It demands that we respect the worth of each person at every moment of their existence – from conception to death - regardless of who they are or how they present themselves in the world. It also asks us to see each person holistically rather than seeking to define them by just one aspect of their identity. Any relevant educational programme and the care of individuals in a Catholic school must be faithful to this Christian Anthropology.

Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender
2022, p.9.

Other Quotes from Pope Francis

[Catholic schools] “are called to stimulate in the pupils the openness to the other as a face, as a person, as a brother and sister to know and respect, with his or her history, merits and defects, riches and limits. The challenge is to cooperate to train young people to be open and interested in the reality that surrounds them, capable of care and tenderness.”

Pope Francis,
Address to the Italian Catholic Primary School Teachers Association,
5 January 2018.

“Parents who see that their children have different sexual orientations, how they manage that and accompany their children and not hide behind a condemning attitude . . . don’t be scared. Never condemn a child.”

Pope Francis,
General Audience,
26 January 2022.

“A person once asked me, in a provocative manner, if I approved of homosexuality. I replied with another question: ‘Tell me: when God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person?’ We must always consider the person.”

Pope Francis in an interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J.
America: The Jesuit Review
30 September 2013

Fr James Martin S.J. ministers to LGBT Catholics in New York. In May 2022, he wrote to Pope Francis asking him some questions that he is commonly asked by members of his community. Pope Francis wrote back to him answering his questions. Below are the answers to two of these questions.

Question: What do you say to an LGBT Catholic who has experienced rejection from the Church?

Pope Francis: “I would have them recognize it not as “the rejection of the church,” but instead of “people in the church.” The church is a mother and calls together all her children. Take for example the parable of those invited to the feast: “the just, the sinners, the rich and the poor, etc.” [Matthew 22:1-15; Luke 14:15-24]. A “selective” church, one of “pure blood,” is not Holy Mother Church, but rather a sect.”

Question: What would you say is the most important thing for LGBT people to know about God?

Pope Francis: “God is Father and he does not disown any of his children. And “the style” of God is “closeness, mercy and tenderness.” Along this path you will find God.”

Vatican News, 09 May 2022.

Suggested Responses to Questions and Concerns

This guide provides some examples of how to respond to questions or concerns from the school community about gender diverse students. It can be used to educate the community about a student who is either in the process of transitioning or has transitioned to a different gender from the one they were assigned to at birth. It provides a structure on how to respond to specific issues as well as how to formulate broader educative responses to gender diversity. The guide offers suggestions and is intended to be customised to suit your specific context.⁶

Why should my child learn about gender at school?

- School is a place where children are taught to respect one another and to learn to work together regardless of their differences. Learning about gender diversity is part of that work. Creating a more tolerant, inclusive and accepting school environment teaches all children to recognise and resist rigid gender stereotypes that can be harmful to a child's developing identity.
- We teach children to stand up for others, to resist bullying and to work together. Australia has different laws that protect people from discrimination regardless of their gender status. It is important to uphold these important laws and teach students to be tolerant and inclusive.
- Many children whose gender is seen as different than what is expected can face very difficult circumstances. Teasing, bullying and violence are common experiences for gender diverse children. *School name* is committed to establishing a school community which values respectful relationships, upholds the dignity of every person and creates a safe environment with a sense of belonging for all. We adhere to the DOBCEL Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy, DOBCEL Pastoral Care and Wellbeing Policy and the Child Safe Standards. Gender education is an important part of upholding these policies and the schools zero tolerance to bullying.

Isn't my child too young to be learning about gender?

- Children are already learning about it. Messages about gender are everywhere (in the media, sport, culture, politics etc). Children receive very clear messages about the 'rules' for being a boy or a girl as well as the consequences for violating them. By learning about gender, children have an opportunity to explore a greater range of interests, ideas and activities. This enables them to be free to discover new talents and interests without the pressure to conform to rigid gender stereotypes. Teaching about gender promotes greater engagement in their learning and more positive mental health outcomes.

If you are talking about gender, will that include teaching about sex and sexuality?

- No. When we discuss gender, we talk about what people like to wear, the activities they engage in and how they feel about themselves. We explore how society portrays typical stereotypes of maleness and femaleness. This is not sexuality. Sexuality involves physical intimacy and attraction. Gender is about self-identity. Gender identity is a person's internal sense of self. This includes all children whether they define themselves in 'typical' gender terms or not.

⁶ Adapted from: Schools in Transition: A guide for supporting transgender students in K-12 schools, Human Rights Campaign Foundation, the original document can be found using the following link.
https://gender-spectrum.cdn.prismic.io/gender-spectrum%2F7c4c63b2-52f2-4cb0-a48f-dd049bf6962c_schools-in-transition-2015-min.pdf

Ideas about gender diversity go against the values we are instilling in my child at home. Are you trying to teach my child to reject these values?

- Absolutely not. Our children encounter people with different beliefs when they join any community. While one aim for learning about diversity is to become more tolerant and accepting of those around us, not everyone is going to be best friends. This does not mean that they cannot get along and learn together. The purpose of learning about gender diversity is to demonstrate that children are unique and that there is no single way to be a boy or a girl. If a child does not agree with or understand another student's gender identity or expression, they do not have to change how they feel inside about it. However, they also do not get to make fun of, harass or harm other students whose gender identity they don't understand or support. Gender diversity education is about teaching students to live and work with others. It comes down to the simple agreement that all children must be treated with kindness and respect.

Won't my child get confused if we speak about more than two gender options?

- Experience shows that, with enough information, children of any age can understand that there are more than the two gender categories currently recognized by our society. When it is explained to them in a simple, age appropriate manner, gender diversity is an easy concept for children to grasp.

Don't children who are trans gender or gender diverse have lots of problems? Is gender nonconformity a product of abuse or emotional problems?

- No. Being gender diverse is part of a normal aspect of human diversity. It is not a malfunction, developmental abnormality or a mental health problem.
- Some gender diverse children experience a lot of societal abuse and parental rejection. This is not the cause of their gender expression. This type of abuse leads many children to experience extreme distress, loneliness, lower self-esteem and other negative feelings. Discrimination and rejection can cause mental health problems, but emotional problems DO NOT cause gender nonconformity.
- Gender diverse students' emotional distress can be greatly reduced when they receive positive support and affirmation from their family, peers and community.

Won't allowing students to express non- traditional genders cause them to be teased or harassed?

- While there is a great deal of data suggesting that gender-expansive youth do face teasing, there is a growing body of knowledge that points to the impact gender-expansive education can have on reducing that treatment. If students are being treated badly because of who they are, the answer is not to try and prevent them from being themselves. Rather, we should instead ask what needs to be done to address the teasing. Providing education that expands students' understanding about stereotypes and limitations of self-expression can go a long way to preventing teasing.

Why is the school making such a big deal about this? How many of these kids are there anyway?

- I can't talk about any individual students, just as I would never talk about your child. Personal information about the students including their gender is private. Is there something we can do to help you or your child better understand gender related issues?
- Gender discrimination is illegal in Australia. There are several laws that protect people's rights. It is important that the school complies with these laws and make sure it is acting inclusively and respectfully for all students regardless of their gender.
- I know this is new territory for many of us. Sometimes change is really challenging. Recent estimates suggest that the prevalence of young people identifying as trans is about one in 100, much higher than previously thought. This equates to about 45,000 school children in Australia, or about 1.00%, are thought to identify as trans.

Won't discussing gender encourage my child to be transgender?

Being transgender is not something that a person chooses. Studies show that although parents cannot make their child gay or transgender, they can deeply influence how their children feel about themselves. Parental pressure to enforce gender conformity can damage a child's self-esteem and is a high predictor of negative health outcomes and risk-taking behaviours for youth. Transgender youth have a high rate of suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Discussing gender will have the effect of removing much of the pressure students face to fit into narrowly defined expectations that few if any can actually meet.

What is to stop a boy from coming to school one day and simply declaring that he is a girl so he can use the girl's bathrooms/ change rooms?

- Schools have always worked to support the needs of individual students in a variety of ways. For any student who requires support related to gender, the school works very deliberately to provide the necessary services. This does not take place without a great deal of care and planning. Schools all over Australia are supporting transgender students in these ways and this issue simply does not come up.
- A transgender student is very different from a young person who is claiming to be a different gender for some improper purpose. Transgender students are not trying to get away with something or make this up. Their gender expression is an important part of their identity and development and should not be viewed as merely a whim or a passing feeling that they have. They are not attention seeking or being defiant.

I don't really feel like I know how to answer my child's questions.

- Once again, explain that you are learning about this too. It is important, however, to monitor and understand your own feelings before you initiate this kind of conversation. Children can pick up on your feelings towards a subject. So, if you are still feeling uncomfortable about the concept of gender diversity, then consider taking additional time to increase your understanding.
- Answer children's questions simply and let them take the lead on how deep the conversation goes. Most children are satisfied with this approach.
- To respect one another and to learn to work together regardless of their differences. Learning about gender diversity is part of that work. Creating a more tolerant, inclusive and accepting school environment teaches all children to recognise and resist rigid gender stereotypes that can be harmful to a child's developing identity.
- Children are taught to stand up for others, resist bullying and to work together. Australia has different laws that protect people from discrimination regardless of their gender status. It is important to uphold these important laws and teach students to be tolerant and inclusive.
- Many children whose gender is seen as different to what is expected can face very difficult circumstances. Teasing, bullying and violence are common experiences for gender diverse children. Here at *insert school name* we have a Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy and this education is an important part of upholding this policy and the schools zero tolerance to bullying.

Isn't this against the church's teaching?

- Our common humanity requires respect for and support of the sanctity and worth of every human life. All other rights and responsibilities flow from the concept of human dignity. This principle is deemed as the central aspect of the Church's moral and social teaching. The belief that each life has value is shared with International Human Rights which are universal, inviolable and inalienable. Church teachings are many and varied and cannot be reduced to a single thought. (Refer back to the statements from Pope Francis).

LGBTQA+ Support Services

Beyondblue

Families like mine: A guide for parents and families of young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, gender diverse or who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity.

https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/bl1138-families-like-mine-booklet-lr_with-links.pdf

Black Rainbow

Support and advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ people experiencing homeless, leaving domestic violence relationships or the justice system. <https://blackrainbow.org.au/>

Genderqueer Australia

Online portal of resources, events and news for transgender and gender diverse people

www.genderqueer.org.au

LIFE/Switchboard

Telephone counselling services, information and advice 1800 184 527 (3pm - 12am daily) www.Qlife.org.au

Minus 18

Minus 18 builds social inclusion and advocates for an Australia where all young people are safe and empowered.

<https://www.minus18.org.au/>

Parents of Gender Diverse Children

Organisation provides direct support for parents or those parenting a trans or gender diverse child. They can provide information, referrals, peer support and community connections. <https://www.pgdc.org.au/>

Rainbow Health Victoria (Formally known as GLHV)

Provides news, resources and research relevant to the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ Australians

www.glhv.com.au

Rainbow Network

Network for state wide and local LGBTIQ+ services <https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/>

Royal Children's Hospital – Gender Diverse Clinic.

Specialised State-wide Service <https://www.rch.org.au/adolescent-medicine/gender-service/>

Transcend

Parent led peer support network and information hub for transgender children and their families in Australia.

<https://transcendaus.org/>

Touch base

Information and support services (Drug and Alcohol, Sexual Health, and Mental Health) for LGBTIQ+ Australians

www.touchbase.org.au

Ygender

Ygender is a peer led social support and advocacy group of trans/gender diverse young people

<https://www.rainbownetwork.com.au/directory/y-gender>

Zoe Belle Gender Collective

Works to improve the health and inclusion of trans and gender diverse people. <http://zbgc.org.au/>

I feel happiest at school when teachers don't overlook the nasty comments.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

Links & Resources

Websites & Recommended Documents

CECV Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

<https://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/getmedia/b9155052-8eb2-48e3-9384-b5ff8407941d/Commitment-Statement-A3.aspx>

DOBCEL Actioning Education for All: A Guide for a Whole of System Approach to Inclusive Practices for Catholic Education Ballarat

https://drive.google.com/file/d/13tYn4Xy_ZmePqyV5jSfYBdYDMXLbuhst/view

DOBCEL Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

[https://esort.ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au/Governance/Policies/2837/DOBCEL-Child-Safety-and-Wellbeing-Policy---2022-\(Contextualise\).docx](https://esort.ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au/Governance/Policies/2837/DOBCEL-Child-Safety-and-Wellbeing-Policy---2022-(Contextualise).docx)

DOBCEL Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy

<https://dobcel.catholic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/DOBCEL-Prevention-of-Bullying-Harassment-Discrimination-Policy-20210419-1.pdf>

DOBCEL Safeguarding Children and Young People: Code of Conduct

<https://dobcel.catholic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Safeguarding-Children-Young-People-Code-of-Conduct-non-school-Ratified-Feb-2023.pdf>

DOBCEL Student Wellbeing Framework

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JJVebXuYrLHKY6nTqXTbEXZK-M_5LMA7/view

Emerging Minds - Supporting Trans and Gender Diverse Kids and their families

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/supporting-trans-and-gender-diverse-children-and-their-families/>

Hill A. O, Lyons A, Jones J, McGowan I, Carman M, Parsons M, Power J, Bourne A (2021)

Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia.

National report, monograph series number 124. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

https://www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1198945/Writing-Themselves-In-4-National-report.pdf

Ministerial Order 1359 - Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the risk of child abuse in schools and school boarding premises.

https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/Ministerial_Order.pdf

Strauss, P., Hill, N.T.M., Marion, L., Gilbey, D., Waters, Z., Moore, J.K., Costanza, M., Lamblin, M., Robinson, J., Lin, A., Perry, Y. (2022). Suicide prevention in LGBTQA+ young people: best practice guidelines for clinical and community service providers. Telethon Kids Institute: Perth, Australia.

<https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/projects/lgbtqa-guidelines/lgbtqa-suicide-prevention-guidelines.pdf>

The Rainbow Owl - Range of children's books

www.the-rainbow-owl.com

Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne Fact sheet

https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Gender_dysphoria/

Parents of Gender Diverse Children - list of picture books and books for middle years, adolescents and parents. https://www.pgdc.org.au/books_for_parents

Books

Bartholomaeus, C., & Riggs, D. W. (2017). *Transgender People and Education*. New York: Palgrave.

Bayly, M. (2012) *Creating Safe Environments for LGBT Students: A Catholic Schools Perspective*. New York: Routledge.

Brill, S., & Kenney, L. (2016). *The Transgender Teen: A Handbook for Parents and Professionals Supporting Transgender and Non-binary Teens*. Jersey City: Cleis Press.

Brill, S., & Pepper, R. (2008). *The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals*. San Francisco: Cleis Press.

Eherenshaft, D. (2011). *Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children*. New York: The Experiment.

Eherenshaft, D. (2016). *The Gender Creative Child: Pathways for Nurturing and Supporting Children who Live Outside Gender Boxes*. New York: The Experiment.

Glossary

Children whose gender differs to what society would typically expect of their gender assigned at birth are often referred to as **transgender** or **gender diverse**.

Cisgender refers to a child who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth

Gender: is a term with many different meanings from one's biological sex, to the 'felt' gender, way a person presents to the world or their expressed gender.

Gender identity: one's own concept of self as male or female. The way in which individuals perceive and describe themselves. It is defined in the legislation as 'the gender-related identity, appearance or mannerisms or other gender-related characteristics of a person (whether by way of medical intervention or not) with or without regard to the person's designated sex at birth' (Sex Discrimination Act 1984).

Gender Incongruence when a person feels that their gender identity does not match the sex assigned at birth.

Gender dysphoria (diagnosis): From the DSM-5: Gender dysphoria is the distress a person feels due to a mismatch between their gender and their sex presumed at birth. Not all trans and gender diverse people experience gender dysphoria, and not all people who experience gender dysphoria are trans and gender diverse.

Gender dysphoria (experience): The distress some trans and gender diverse people experience when being misgendered or facing barriers to gender affirming care.

Gender euphoria: A feeling of happiness, enjoyment, excitement and/or positivity some trans and gender diverse people experience about their gender. This can be due to feeling positively about their gender, being gendered correctly, feeling seen and respected, or affirming their gender how they want.

Gender transitioning: the process where a transgender person commences living as a member of another sex. This may occur through medical intervention, style of dressing, or anything else that indicates an intention to commence living permanently as a member of another sex.

Intersex: the status of having physical, hormonal genetic or chromosomal features that are:

- (a) neither wholly female nor wholly male; (or)
- (b) a combination of female and male; (or)
- (c) neither female nor male' (Sex Discrimination Act 1984).

Being intersex is about biological variations, not about a person's gender identity. People with intersex variations share the same range of sexual orientation and gender identities as people with no intersex variations.

Non-binary refers to a child who may not be exclusively male or female. They may use pronouns to signal their non-binary gender, such as 'they'.

Sex: a biological term dividing a species into male and female, usually based on physical, hormonal, chromosomal and genetic characteristics.

Sexual orientation refers to who you are attracted to sexually. Gender is different from sexual orientation. Someone who is transgender or gender diverse may be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual or asexual.

Sistergirls and Brotherboys

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may use these terms to refer to transgender people. Brotherboy typically refers to masculine spirited people who are born female, and Sistergirl typically refers to feminine spirited people who are born male.

I feel safe at school when I am with my LGBTQIA+ friends or somewhere with LGBTQIA+ flags.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

Inclusion means everybody being represented, and made to feel valid.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat.

Celebrating diversity is essential because this is who we are. Catholic schools are filled with unique children and young people. Our responsibility in ensuring 'the fullness of life for all' is to celebrate diversity and ensure all children and young people always feel safe, connected and respected.

Deputy Principal - Primary
Diocese of Ballarat

I wish I could tell myself in primary school that it's ok not to know who you are yet.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

I wish my teachers knew more about the importance of using correct pronouns.

Secondary Student
Diocese of Ballarat

Appendix One: Student Support Plan – Gender Affirmation

Acknowledgement: This plan has been adapted and developed over a number of years by a range of people in the LGBTQI+, Transcend and youth sector in Victoria. *This will help to guide a conversation to support a student with affirming their gender at school.* Consultation with the young person and parent/guardians are essential for the completion of this document, it may not be necessary for every element of the plan to be completed but should be considered. Other documentation that could be considered include attendance data, school reports, PLP's, and any external professional/agency reports.

Affirming name:		Affirming pronouns:	Previous name:
Year Level:	Class Group:	Date:	Are Parent(s) or Carer(s) aware and supportive? *Please contact CEB Wellbeing staff if further support is needed.
Name of Parent/Carer: Contact Information:		Siblings: Are they aware? Are they supportive? Will they need extra support?	
Do you identify with a particular ethnic group (for example Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, Chinese, Sudanese, Vietnamese, etc.)? If so, are you happy to identify which one/s? If 'yes' are you aware of other resources in the community (other than the internet) that you could connect with and support you?			

Who is part of the school staff support team/group? This should be made up of a team of staff that the student feels comfortable in talking to. How often will the support group meet? (this may change over time) Who is the main contact person? Who would the student like to speak with at school if issues arise? How do they access this person? <i>*The main contact person should be included in any required SSG meetings.</i>	
Student Voice What has been working well for you at school this year? What is/are your favourite subject(s)? Do you participate in any extracurricular activities? What do you enjoy doing e.g. reading, playing games, drawing etc? How would you describe yourself as a learner? To what extent do you feel connected to the different elements of the school community- friends, teachers, other staff members, classes, sports, arts, other families etc. Have there been any challenges at school for you?	

Support Categories	Management and Support Strategies	Responsible Person (if applicable)
School documents and records What school records would the student like changed? Name, gender identity and gender marker? Think about the documents where the student's name and/or gender appears (eg class lists, academic records, reports, school photos/magazines etc.)		
Privacy and Confidentiality Who is aware the student is affirming their gender? Are these people at school or community members? Who needs to be informed? What needs to be shared? (or doesn't need to be shared) How will the student's privacy be maintained?		

Support Categories	Management and Support Strategies	Responsible Person (if applicable)
School uniform and policy What uniform items does the student feel comfortable to wear? Do new uniform items need to be considered? What arrangements are needed to support any uniform changes for the student? Look at uniform policy. Is it gendered? Can it just be a list of uniform items for anyone to wear?		
Toilets and changing rooms What toilets would the student prefer to use? What change rooms would the student prefer to use? If events outside of school are taking place (swimming, camps etc.) clarify these arrangements with the student. <i>*Students without a disability should not be required to use disabled toilets of facilities.</i>		

Support Categories	Management and Support Strategies	Responsible Person (if applicable)
Additional areas to consider - including travel to/from school Are there other places and spaces at school where you don't feel safe e.g. playground, library canteen, lockers? Are there times at school when you don't feel safe? Do you feel safe in your mode of transport to/from school e.g. bus, walking, trains, transport hub etc? Discuss options to respond to this. <i>Revisit this question.</i>		
Communication to Staff Who else on staff would the student like to be informed? (Keeping in mind the student's privacy) Will all staff need to be informed? How/when would the student like this to happen? Who is responsible for informing relief staff of the plan (if appropriate/necessary)?		

Support Categories	Management and Support Strategies	Responsible Person (if applicable)
Teacher Formation Do staff need additional professional learning to increase knowledge and understanding of gender affirmation and incongruence? Who are the external agencies that may provide support to staff e.g. Headspace, Royal Children’s Hospital etc? Does our school require further support/resources from Catholic Education Ballarat, e.g. Student Wellbeing Team?		
Communication to students Who else would the student like to inform? How/when would they like to do this? How/when would the student like this information shared? How/when will the students’ friendship group be informed/supported?		

Support Categories	Management and Support Strategies	Responsible Person (if applicable)
School Community response considerations Who will respond to any potential community concerns? Does this contact person require further support? (Consider contacting CEB Wellbeing Team) What information will you provide to staff so that they are responding correctly? <i>Key question:</i> What does the student want people to know about them? (Note: You need to affirm facts but maintaining confidentiality is paramount.)		
Bullying and discrimination Is the student experiencing bullying? Has there been any discrimination towards the student? How has it been dealt with? Is the student experiencing any cyber bullying? Is there anything else that is of concern to the student? <i>*Refer to your school's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy & Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy</i>		

Support Categories	Management and Support Strategies	Responsible Person (if applicable)
External Agencies Does the student have access to support from any external agencies? Does the student have access to support from a GP and/or allied health professionals such as psychologists, social workers etc? Does the student/families have access to specialist services if required? Does the student think it would be useful for the school to liaise with these agencies or have them involved in any support meetings? <i>If relevant:</i> What are the names and contact details of the external agencies? <i>*If required complete a Consent to Share Information form.</i> What is the nature and length of their support?		

Support Categories	Management and Support Strategies	Responsible Person (if applicable)
Other considerations School transitions e.g. primary to secondary, between year levels/semesters etc. Change in living situation. Are there any questions or concerns you want to raise now? Are there any other supports the student may need?		

Review	
Plan Review Who will monitor this plan? When will the plan be reviewed? <i>* To be negotiated with relevant parties as required (minimum of once per year and/or points of transition for the student)</i> Include feedback from the student, parents / guardians and teachers. Who has a copy of this plan?	
	Signatures

	Student	Date:
	School representative (e.g Principal, Assistant Principal, Wellbeing Leader)	Date:
	Parent/Carer	Date:

I am proud and awesome.
I can be me.

Secondary Students
Diocese of Ballarat