



**Executive Council
of Australian Jewry Inc.**

Meeting with NSW Minister for Education
30 July 2020

Nearly 30 years ago the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia concluded that the harms of racial vilification go well beyond hurt feelings or injured sensibilities and consist instead of “adverse effects on the quality of life and well-being of individuals or groups who have been targeted because of their race”.

The shocking racist bullying of Jewish children at public schools in Victoria last year, which included a serious assault, and similar but less well-publicised incidents in public and private schools in NSW, demonstrate the truth of that conclusion and highlight also the destructive nexus between racist attitudes and language, and acts of violence.

Against that background, representatives of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and NSW Jewish Board of Deputies met with NSW Education Minister Sarah Mitchell on 29 July 2020, to discuss ways of addressing prejudice and bullying through school education, especially at key stages in a child’s development when issues of difference take root.

"Holocaust education is of course an essential part of education against racism", said ECAJ co-CEO Peter Wertheim. "However, by the time students get to year 9 or 10 and study the Holocaust in history, they are pretty much formed in their character and opinions, and it might be too late. We need to do more and start much younger, as incidents of racist bullying have occurred even in primary school".

"There is scope within the existing content of curricula across the disciplines to incorporate techniques of critical thinking and education against prejudice generally, but the message will be lost unless anti-Jewish and other common forms of prejudice are specifically addressed", he added. "Generic human rights and citizenship education are not sufficient. These positive values are lost unless students from a young age are also equipped to resist the myriad negative influences of racism they encounter online, in social media and elsewhere."

"Parallel to these elements of the primary and secondary curricula is the need for strengthened professional development for teachers", Peter Wertheim observed. "In addition, if bullying does occur at school, a system of rapid intervention needs to be developed and incorporated into government guidelines in order to bring about prompt and effective corrective action by the principal and teachers".

Peter Wertheim said that the ECAJ is looking to partner with representatives of other affected communities. "Ultimately this should be a national effort, but we have to start somewhere," he said. "We commend the NSW Minister for Education for her understanding of the problem and for agreeing to assist us to develop and refine these ideas by putting us in touch with the relevant curriculum authorities".

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