



SAFETY AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2026-2030



Government
of South Australia
Department for Education

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge that work undertaken to develop this strategy took place mainly on the traditional lands of the Kurna people and we respect their spiritual relationship with their Country.

We acknowledge the Kurna people as the custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kurna people today. We also respect the cultural authority of traditional owners from other areas across South Australia.

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FOREWORD

Public education is for every child and young person in South Australia. Educators and staff work in partnership with families and communities to nurture, develop and empower all South Australian children and young people with the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need to become fulfilled individuals, compassionate citizens and lifelong learners.

Creating safe, supportive working and learning environments is vital to enable children, young people, our staff and community to thrive. Society is becoming increasingly complex. From increasing mental and physical health needs, challenges related to dispersed and diverse communities and growing economic polarisation and social fragmentation. Schools and preschools are microcosms of broader society where many of these challenges are realised within the learning and working environments.

Having a clear department-wide commitment to a proactive and supportive approach to safety and wellbeing is more important than ever. Our staff are doing a great job, however, there is more we can do to provide clarity and build capability to ensure that every school, preschool and corporate site has what it needs to keep people safe and well. The Safety and Wellbeing Strategy is a step forward in supporting our educators, protecting our people and creating a safe environment for everyone to thrive.

The Strategy for Public Education describes our levers for impact, recognising that our ability to enact change and create impact primarily occurs through our people and the ways we work together. Our people are our strongest levers for impact, particularly those working alongside our learners.

The guiding principles underpinning the strategy describe how we make decisions and the ways in which we work to activate the levers for impact. The levers for impact and the guiding principles are foundations upon which the Department's Safety and Wellbeing Strategy is built on.

By working together, we will make safety visible, valued and embedded across public education in South Australia.



Professor Martin Westwell

*Chief Executive,
Department for Education*



Hon Lucy Hood MP

*Minister for Education,
Training and Skills*

WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE PROFESSION

In developing this strategy, we engaged widely with leaders, teachers, educators, unions, associations, WHS professionals, executive leaders and external consultants to understand the current experience of safety and wellbeing across our schools, preschools and corporate divisions. Stakeholder feedback was compelling and consistent.

People told us they need:

- a coherent, department-wide safety and wellbeing strategy, aligned to the Strategy for Public Education, that prioritises and addresses the key risks
- better support to understand the drivers contributing to psychosocial risks, workplace violence and cumulative staff wellbeing pressures and enhanced support to manage these risks
- greater clarity about WHS roles, responsibilities and accountabilities
- practical, easy-to-use guidance, tools and systems that reduce duplication and administrative burden
- more visible WHS leadership and stronger capability at all levels
- better use of data to identify risks early and support timely intervention
- contextualised support that reflects the realities of different sites and communities
- increased access to WHS expertise, including stronger support through WHS business partners and the central WHS Unit
- improved WHS governance and consultation processes, including better use of health and safety representatives in sites
- systems that help - not more compliance
- safety that is embedded in everyday work, not treated as an add-on.

These messages have directly shaped the choices we have made in this strategy and our definition of success.

OUR STRATEGY CHOICES

In developing this strategy, we have drawn on what we heard from the profession, analysis of our data and evidence, and the department's broader strategic priorities.

We know that creating safer learning and working environments requires a coherent approach, leveraging multiple levers and initiatives. WHS cannot be improved through isolated and fragmented initiatives.

By setting a clear, people-centred safety and wellbeing strategy, building capability, focusing on the highest risks and simplifying systems and support, we will embed safety as a visible and valued part of everyday work. Our people will feel more supported, informed and confident to manage risks proactively, with better access to data-driven insights and practical support.

This will create safer, more sustainable learning and work environments where our staff, children and young people can thrive.

In response, we have established a set of integrated choices to enact meaningful and sustainable improvement and achieve our vision.

OUR VISION

Our vision is for the safety and wellbeing of our people to inform every decision, empowering staff to enhance the learning and wellbeing for children and young people across South Australia.





OUR FOCUS AREAS

To enact our safety and wellbeing strategy over the next five years we will focus on:



Empowering our people



Designing work so our people can thrive



Managing risk proactively



Empowering our people



Growing a culture where our people are confident and capable of creating safe, respectful and sustainable working and learning environments.

The strategy will ensure our people have the support, knowledge, tools and clarity required to manage increasingly complex environments safely.

This includes:

- building leadership capability to make informed and confident decisions
- clarifying WHS roles, responsibilities and accountability
- strengthening role-specific capability and professional learning

- increasing access to practical support and guidance
- strengthening consultation, communication and speaking-up cultures

WHS risk profiles differ across metropolitan, regional and remote sites, early childhood settings, primary schools, secondary schools, special options and disability units, Aboriginal schools and corporate workplaces. A one-size fits-all approach does not adequately support the complexity of the South Australian public education system.

We will strengthen WHS support through tailored responses based on local risk profiles and contexts. Building leadership capability in WHS aligned with local contextual factors will empower leaders to make more informed, confident decisions.

Priorities to strengthen and embed

- Support leaders to build their confidence and capability in WHS to feel empowered to make decisions based on local risk profiles by increasing the on-the-job, practical support provided by WHS business partners across metropolitan, regional and remote areas.
- Provide more proactive and face-to-face support for site leaders, including improved access to timely advice, tools and escalation pathways.
- Strengthen role-specific WHS capability development through targeted communication and professional learning.
- Align WHS business partner support to risk profiles and site complexity so that support is provided where it is needed most to empower leaders and staff.
- Tailor WHS responses for different settings including high-complexity sites, special settings, early childhood services, remote and Aboriginal schools.
- Reduce administrative burden by providing clearer and more practical guidance so that sites are empowered to focus on what matters most.
- Strengthen partnerships across corporate divisions to ensure site leaders experience greater coherence in relation to policy related to WHS, ways of working and communication.
- Increase the capability and visibility of Health and Safety Representatives in sites through enhanced training, practical tools and guidance, and opportunities for HSRs to connect and share effective practice across their network and the system.
- Define a clear, consistent and integrated WHS operating model and governance framework, with defined roles, responsibilities, processes and oversight mechanisms.
- Redesign WHS information architecture, supported by an AI bot, to ensure all safety information is accessible and user friendly so the workforce can get the information they need quickly and easily.

Designing work so our people can thrive



Designing roles, work and environments to strengthen psychosocial safety and provide our people with what they need to learn and thrive.

Psychosocial risk is one of the most significant work health and safety challenges across education. Violence and aggression (from students and parents), dysregulation, workload intensity, vicarious trauma and emotional demands impact staff wellbeing, retention and confidence.

This strategy will strengthen support, reduce unnecessary complexity and simplify systems so our people can focus on what they do best.

This includes:

- strengthening respectful, inclusive and culturally responsive workplaces
- building confidence to identify and manage psychosocial risks
- designing more sustainable ways of working
- reducing unnecessary administrative burden, drawing on initiatives such as - Empowering Educators to Thrive

Our initial focus will be to strengthen our proactive management of psychosocial risk through an integrated and preventative approach.

Priorities to strengthen and embed

- Equip leaders to build site cultures that are inclusive and respectful for all, supported by strong leadership, opportunity for staff and students to have a say in how to strengthen safety and positive culture and enhanced school, family and community partnerships.
- Embed policies to eliminate discrimination, bullying and harassment (eg Anti-racism policy, Respectful workplace policy, sexual harassment policy).
- Embed psychosocial risk policy and framework and supporting materials.
- Equip leaders to understand and respond to the drivers contributing to psychosocial risk (eg dysregulated behaviour, job and emotional demands).
- Monitor, evaluate and respond to wellbeing outcomes for staff and students (e.g. employee surveys, Wellbeing and Engagement Collection).
- Establish a critical incident response team to provide immediate psychological support to sites experiencing critical incidents, including the provision of counselling, debriefing, peer support, referral services, regular follow ups and monitoring to assess potential cumulative impact.
- Strengthen responses to student violence supported by restorative and trauma informed practices and behaviour mentoring.
- Design more sustainable work by balancing job demands with available resources, improving access to practical supports and resources, clarifying roles and responsibilities, setting clear performance and behavioural expectations and increasing opportunities for staff to contribute to decisions that affect their work and wellbeing.
- Embed WHS into every day and broader strategic risk and operational decision-making to ensure WHS becomes a part of "how decisions are made" and safety is considered alongside educational outcomes, resource management and operational needs.
- Explore alternate workforce models that reduce administrative and operational burden to build local leadership density and capability.
- Improve targeted, audience specific WHS communications so that it is clear, timely and actionable, enabling all staff to take effective action.

Managing risk proactively



Harnessing insights, evidence and assurance to understand risk, strengthen our responses and support better decisions – every day.

Through the strategy, resources will be focused on the risks that matter most, improving visibility of emerging risks, and intervening earlier to prevent harm.

Assurance, data insights, reporting and risk management capability will be strengthened to support safer and more consistent outcomes across all sites.

This includes:

- focusing on critical enterprise WHS risks
- developing contextual risk profiling for different site types
- improving assurance and oversight of critical controls
- using data and insights to identify trends and emerging risks and to facilitate proactive intervention, prevention and system-wide learning

Workplace violence is one of the most significant and increasing risks across the department. The data shows us that this is particularly evident in sites managing high levels of complex student behaviours, and staff are repeatedly exposed to aggression, threats and psychosocial harm (from students and families).

Priorities to strengthen and embed

- Use incident, injury and wellbeing data to identify priority sites and emerging trends.
- Implement targeted, evidence-informed interventions, through a coordinated “team around the site” approach for sites identified as experiencing elevated levels of workplace violence and aggression, including proactive prevention and de-escalation approaches.
- Streamline processes to support site leaders to complete essential WHS compliance tasks that can be cumbersome and time consuming.
- Share learnings and effective WHS practice across the system through targeted communication channels.
- Establish a departmental Critical WHS Risk Framework that defines the most serious risks, sets clear controls and ensure they are consistently managed.
- Implement a system-wide, risk based WHS assurance program that provides consistent oversight, identifies and prioritises key risks.
- Implement AI-enabled WHS data capabilities to provide timely, accurate and actionable insights to enable proactive identification and management of risks and targeted support to high-risk sites.
- Continue to ensure that planning, decision-making and implementation phases of the department’s 20 Year Education Infrastructure plan are prioritised.

OUR APPROACH TO SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Delivering on our vision and focus areas depends not only on what we prioritise, but how safety and wellbeing is experienced across the system.

Our approach recognises that meaningful improvement happens when WHS is embedded into leadership, operations and everyday decision-making - not delivered as a separate compliance activity.

WHAT WILL BE DIFFERENT

Our approach to safety and wellbeing will change how safety is experienced across our system.

Educators and leaders will see clear shifts in how safety and wellbeing is supported, understood and embedded in everyday work.

FROM	TO
Compliance-driven processes	Practical systems that support safe work
One-size-fits-all approaches	Tailored support based on local risk and context
Unclear responsibilities	Clear accountability and visible leadership
Fragmented systems and paper-based processes	Integrated digital tools and simpler access to information
Reactive incident response	Proactive prevention and risk-based intervention
Central ownership of WHS	Shared responsibility with strong central and system support
Generic communication	Role-specific guidance and trusted communication channels
Limited access to specialist support	Increased WHS business partner access and stronger central support

HOW WE WILL IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

To bring this strategy to life, work health and safety must feel practical, relevant and achievable.

Implementation will occur through a staged, system-wide program of reform between 2026 and 2030.

The department will prioritise several high-impact reform areas that respond directly to what we found from the data and heard leaders, teachers, educators, unions and associations during the consultation period. The strategy will be supported through an operational plan, phased across the five-year period.

We will continue to listen to our people, monitor impact, and adapt our approach to ensure our people are empowered, we design work so our people can thrive, and we proactively focus on the risks that matter the most.

MEASURING SUCCESS

This strategy sets a five-year direction for work health and safety across public education in South Australia.

Success will be measured through improved safety outcomes, enhanced workforce wellbeing, stronger leadership confidence, and increased WHS system maturity.

We will know we are succeeding when every worker, child and young person, and volunteer in our schools, preschools and workplaces is safe, respected and able to thrive. Where quality teaching and learning can flourish in stable, supportive, and safe environments, and there is a sustainable reduction in injuries, critical incidents, and psychological harm across school, preschool and corporate sites.

Regular review cycles, governance oversight and WHS maturity assessments will ensure this strategy remains responsive, practical and aligned to system priorities, the needs of our sites, and ongoing progress.





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