

Program helps schools SOAR above racism

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The results of a pilot program to mitigate racism in schools found it gave students the confidence and knowledge to intervene to address racist behaviour.

The Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) program — which supports schools, teachers and students to recognise and reject racism — was conducted at schools in NSW and Victoria and researchers involved in its development believe it should be rolled out nationally.

Students and teachers who were part of the program across two school terms for years 5 and 6 felt it gave them something concrete to do about racism.

Analysis of the pilot showed students and teachers believed the program raised teacher confidence to discuss and address racism, and increased students' awareness of racism. It also enhanced their knowledge and confidence to intervene to address racism and reduced racial discrimination at school.

Federation Senior Vice President Amber Flohm said it was vital that schools are free from racism so all children have the opportunity to thrive and learn without the harm that bullying and racism brings.



“Unfortunately racist attitudes don’t stop at the front gate,” Ms Flohm told 10 News after the release of the analysis of the program.

The program’s lead researcher Associate Professor Naomi Priest, from the Australian National University, said there was “strong evidence” of the detrimental effects of racism on children.

“This includes directly experiencing racism, as well as witnessing it online, in the news and on social media.

“This ‘second-hand’ racism is also harmful for children’s health. Children don’t have to directly experience racism for it to impact their health. We also know racism is on the rise during Coronavirus.”

The program includes teacher training and support, a unit of work, auditing of school policies and practices, and student-led activities to address racism in the wider school and community.

Associate Professor Priest said SOAR supported teachers and students to develop the skills they need to recognise and reject racism, as proactive bystanders for incidents of individual racism as well as at a systemic level.