

Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools



National Register
Report 2024-2025

Australia Palestine
Advocacy Network



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Acknowledgements:

The research team and the Australian Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN) gratefully acknowledge Nada Abdel-Fattah for support in managing the Register, Sara Saleh for assistance with tools and protocols and Kawsar Ali and Nadeen Madkour for research support.

Cover Art by Amani Haydar.
Photography by Angelita Biscotti.

This report was written on unceded, stolen Aboriginal Lands and as the authors who include three Palestinians and one white settler, we hold ourselves accountable to the Peoples whose Lands we live on. These authors respect the sovereignty of First Nations peoples and their relationships to Country, community, rivers, seas and each other. We are proud to note the rich and longstanding history of Blak-Palestinian solidarity.

Citation:

Al-Natour, R., Rudolph, S., Abdel-Fattah, R., & Sammak, T. M. (2025). *Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools*, Melbourne: Australia Palestine Advocacy Network.

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Message from APAN President

Anti-Palestinian racism is not a new phenomenon. Rooted in the same colonial forms of oppression that are so familiar to our First Nations siblings, anti-Palestinian racism has always manifested in the targeting, intimidating, censoring and smearing of Palestinians, and those who stand in solidarity with us, and our struggle for justice.

This insidious and systemic form of racism has emerged as a particularly ugly stain on Australian political and social life over the past two years, since Israel unleashed its genocide upon the people of Gaza. From workplaces to cultural institutions, public spaces to commercial centres, the political arena to media outlets, anti-Palestinian racism has taken many forms – slander, dehumanisation, Nakba- and genocide-denial, exclusion, defamation, violence, the criminalisation of political expression and protest. And, as this harrowing report demonstrates, our schools and educational institutions have not been spared. This is hardly surprising. As the authors show, the Australian education system, a tool of Australian settler colonialism, inherently transmits, reproduces and protects the state’s national interests – and the interests of other such colonial projects around the world, including Zionist Israel’s.

This report is the first of its kind to examine the way that anti-Palestinian racism, and the climate of fear, censorship, intimidation and punishment it engenders, is experienced by students, teachers, non-teaching staff and members of school communities across Australia. It brings together reports of lived experiences contributed to the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network’s (APAN) Anti-Palestinian Racism in Schools Register over a period of 4 months, to demonstrate not only how widespread this racism is, but how thoroughly it has been normalised in educational settings. Further, this Register demonstrated how critical collective acknowledgement of this scourge is as the first step towards addressing anti-Palestinian racism.

This report makes a number of key recommendations that are of vital importance to education departments and schools across the country, the first of which I cannot emphasise enough, given the common root of the discrimination and oppression faced by both First Nations and Palestinian people: government and institutions must urgently focus on First Nations social justice in schools as a way of addressing all forms of institutional racism.

As Israel's genocide escalates – more than 60,000 Palestinians have been murdered by the Zionist state, and the entire population of Gaza is at risk of mass starvation as Israel blocks access to life-saving aid at the time of writing – I also emphasise the importance of education departments protecting the rights of students, educators and communities alike to learn about the Gaza Genocide, and express their dissent to Australia's complicity in this atrocity. To do so is no more or less than an expression of shared humanity with Palestinians.

APAN owes a debt of gratitude to the research team and those who have supported the management of the Register during these past horrific months. This is a crucial body of work that I know will ensure our places of learning, and those committed to educating young minds, are well equipped to address anti-Palestinian racism, and all forms of systemic oppression, towards making our educational spaces places of critical inquiry, freedom of expression, and empowerment.

Nasser Mashni
President, Australia Palestine Advocacy Network

Endorsements

Chelsea Watego,
Professor and Executive
Director, Carumba
Institute, Chancellory
Division, Queensland
University of Technology

This report marks a crucial intervention in breaking the silence surrounding the rising tide of anti-Palestinian racism experienced within Australian educational settings by students and staff alike. These accounts, while frequent and widespread rarely capture media attention or community concern; but this is not a matter of indifference. The experiences documented in this report reveal the active, overt and aggressive measures deployed to dismiss, erase and punish those who dare speak of or think about Palestine inside and outside of the classroom. We can observe an intensification of anti-Palestinian racism seemingly made possible through the absence of consequences by school leadership. Yet it is through the testimonies of school students that we get to witness tremendous courage, care and deep political and humanitarian commitments of which we all must take heed and draw strength from.

Tony Birch,
Professor and Boisbouvier
Chair in Australian
Literature, University
of Melbourne

APAN's report, 'Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools', should be compulsory reading for all of us who strive to live in a just and equitable society. Considering the extent of genocidal violence being committed against the people of Gaza and the West Bank, it is shocking to read about the extent of anti-Palestinian racism in Australia. We must not only educate ourselves on this urgent issue, we must act to support those whose basic human rights are being violated and dismantled.

Joseph Pugliese,
Professor of
Cultural Studies,
Macquarie University

This is a landmark, urgent and compelling report that brings into graphic focus the widespread injustices that students and staff have experienced in the context of the ongoing Gaza Genocide and the institutionalised practices of anti-Palestinian racism in Australian schools. The report draws on student and staff testimonies documented in a national register to evidence the shocking scale of the anti-Palestinian racism, repression, censorship and punishment that has unfolded in our educational institutions. By offering a series of groundbreaking policy recommendations, this report establishes a crucial template upon which to build a truly just and equitable model of education.

Penny Rabinga,
Independent anti-
racism researcher and
activist, England

As an independent researcher and activist whose work focuses on racism in schools, I find "Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools" an invaluable and important report, which meticulously documents widespread and normalised anti-Palestinian racism evident across Australian educational institutions. This crucial work demonstrates how deeply systemic racism, rooted in settler-colonial logics, manifests through silencing, censorship and vilification, creating hostile environments and profoundly impacting students and staff. This report is essential reading for those committed to challenging and dismantling institutional racism in education in Australia and worldwide.

Fethi Mansouri,
Deakin Distinguished
Professor, Founding
Director of the Alfred
Deakin Institute
for Citizenship and
Globalisation, and UNESCO
Chairholder, Cultural
Diversity and Social Justice

As a migrant and scholar working on multiculturalism and racism living on the unceded lands of First Nations peoples, I carry a deep and enduring awareness of the historical and ongoing injustices—subjugation, dispossession, and violence—that continue to shape this nation. In the face of rising anti-Palestinian racism and the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, this report arrives not only as timely, but as profoundly necessary. Schools are not passive vessels of knowledge—they are active sites of social formation, where values are instilled and futures imagined. Yet, as this report compellingly documents, too many educational institutions have faltered in their duty to support students and educators who speak out against genocide, war, and systemic oppression. The authors have produced a rigorous, courageous, and deeply principled work that lays bare these failures and charts a path toward meaningful change. I urge policymakers and educators to engage with this report—not as a formality, but as a moral imperative. Let its findings guide policy, reshape curricula, and inspire leadership that is bold, compassionate, and unafraid to confront injustice. If we are to build a truly inclusive and equitable society, our schools must be empowered to stand at the forefront of that transformation—with moral clarity, unwavering empathy, and resolute conviction.

Jane Kenway,
Emeritus Professor
of Education,
Monash University

This Report draws on a strong data base to clarify the different expressions of anti-Palestinian racism in Australia's schools. They include ignorance about Palestinian history and callous and hurtful practices of silencing, stigmatisation and marginalisation by senior staff, teachers and students. This Report also demonstrates how fine-sounding curriculum policy is misused at all levels of the system — doublespeak and double standards intersect. Its empirical analysis is enriched by a formidable grasp of the relevant literature and theory. It persuasively explains that anti-Palestinian racism is an element of education's long standing settler colonial project. To address the former, the system must address the latter.

Suvendrini Perera,
John Curtin Distinguished
Emerita Professor,
Curtin University

With analytical clarity, meticulous documentation and expert unfolding of the historical, policy and social contexts, this report lays out how anti-Palestinian racism has operated in our school system since October 7 2023 — although the conditions for this behaviour were established long before then. Drawing on student and staff testimonies that are at times shocking to read, the report demonstrates the granular, everyday levels at which anti-Palestinian racism is acted out inside our classrooms and on school grounds. At the same time, the authors lucidly explain how official policies and directives enable and compound these racist acts. Students and staff who express solidarity with Gaza are not only disciplined and penalised—even when they have not breached any rules—but are also subject to ostracism, silencing, public ridicule, humiliation and vilification. This report is essential reading for parents, teachers, education bureaucrats and anyone else with a stake in our school system—that is, for just about all of us.

Arathi Sriprakash,
Professor of Sociology
and Education, University
of Oxford

We must not look away from the findings of this landmark report. It evidences the devastating forms and impacts of anti-Palestinian racism in Australian schools. It helps us understand the connections between these experiences and Australia's ongoing settler colonial violence. It urges the entire education community to act. Through its rigorous analysis and clear-sighted recommendations, this report offers a roadmap to stop the normalisation of anti-Palestinian racism in education. At a time when we are witnessing the genocide of Palestinians by Israel and its allies, this imperative has never been more urgent.

Dr Ritesh Shah,
Pouako Matua (Senior
Lecturer) in Te Pūtahi
Mātauranga (Faculty of
Arts and Education) and
Mautaki (co-director) of
Tāwharau Whakaumu
(Centre for Asia Pacific
Refugee Studies)

This evidence-based report provides one of the clearest indications yet of how notions of 'neutrality' and 'comfort' have legitimated clear examples of anti-Palestinian racism within our education system. What is clear is that such actions do not serve to protect the interests of students, staff, and our wider community, or the goals of a multicultural and democratic state, but rather reinforce norms of exclusion, whiteness, and xenophobia. It is the latest in a litany of examples of how the settler colonial state has long used education as a tool of epistemic violence and dispossession of minoritised groups. The importance of seeing this report, not just as one of anti-Palestinian racism, but of the ongoing harm produced by state education systems built on colonial and imperial logics should compel all of us to act and understand that the oppression of one, is symptomatic of the oppression of many.

Fazal Rizvi,
Emeritus Professor
of Global Studies in
Education, University
of Melbourne

The Israeli state and its supporters have developed a range of claims to justify their brutality in Palestine. The most spurious of these claims include the assumptions that the Jews are the chosen people and are therefore inherently superior to all others, that there is no distinction to be drawn between the Jewish people and the political project of Zionism, and that the borders of Israel stretch from the Jordan River to the Sea by divine right. These metaphysical claims are inherently racist. They are used widely to rationalize veiled racism directed against the Palestinian people. This report indicates the need to challenge this form of moral blindness by encouraging conversations that are more honest and candid.

Salim Vally,
Professor, Faculty of
Education, University
of Johannesburg

This groundbreaking register by APAN is a vital counter-hegemonic project against institutional racism toward Palestinians, First Nations people and others in Australian public schools. Anti-Palestinian racism, overt or insidious, in schools, the media and by politicians is necessary to dehumanise Palestinians to facilitate colonialism, apartheid and genocide. For South Africans and our indigenous brothers and sisters in Australia, this is familiar history. The genocide in Palestine today is the litmus test for humanity, including for the purpose of education. Despite the murders, starvation and lies, the génocidaires know they are losing and are desperate. The recommendations contained in this report are essential for the fightback.

SECONDARY- PREP EDUCATION

Khuz'a Prep, Girls School
 Khuz'a Prep, Boys School
 Maghara Prep, Girls School
 Ma'en Prep, Boys School
 Nuseirat Prep, Girls School
 Mamounia Prep, Girls School
 Khanza Prep, Co-Ed School
 New Gaza Prep, Boys School
 New Khan Younis Girls School
 Qarara Prep, Co-Ed School
 Rafah Prep, Boys School
 Rimal Prep, Girls School
 Rimal Prep, Boys School
 Maghazi Prep, Girls School
 Khanza Prep, Co-Ed School
 Sabra Prep, Girls School
 Shajaiya Prep, Boys School
 Al Shouka Prep, Girls School
 al Taif Prep, Boys School
 Tal Sultan Prep, Girls School
 Wadi Gaza Prep, Co-Ed School
 Tal El-Hawa Prep, Boys School
 Tal El-Hawa Prep, Girls School
 Tal Rumaida Prep, School
 Umayya Prep, Boys School
 al Zaitoun Prep, Boys School
 al Zaitoun Prep, Girls School
 Al Zawayda Prep, Co-Ed School

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Since October 2023, 90 percent of schools have been destroyed in Gaza. Books, pencils, desks and chairs: all the learning resources from childrens' classrooms are gone. School buildings, which were designated as 'safe zones' were directly targeted by the Israeli Defence Force.

We have chosen to represent secondary school students and the adults that work with them using a placard from one of the school strikes organised by secondary students here in Naarm.



SECONDARY EDUCATION

"Schools have always played a crucial role in the empowerment and movement for liberation of the Palestinian people." (Emin Alhaj Ali)

In Gaza, secondary education refers to years eleven and twelve. At this stage of their education, students might choose to continue with their general education, or start a vocational program.



Signs showing impact of Israeli incursion on Gaza's school system during Teachers and School Staff for Palestine's 'Scholasticide Vigil'
 Naarm, 28 November 2024. Image: Angelita Biscotti

YES, I should
 be at school
BUT, so should
 the children
 !! IN GAZA !!

Executive Summary

This report communicates an analysis of the submissions to the Anti-Palestinian Racism in Schools Register ('the Register'). Its aim was to collect and document experiences in education of being silenced and discriminated against for showing solidarity with Palestine since the beginning of the Gaza Genocide in October 2023. The authors of this report draw urgent attention to the extent of anti-Palestinian racism across Australian schools in the hope that policymakers, educational institutions, school authorities and civil organisations can collectively address this crisis.

The report shows how anti-Palestinian racism is deployed against members of the Palestinian community and their supporters. This report analyses the testimonies of 84 respondents to the Register, using research and theories that seek to understand settler colonialism and racism within education. In doing this, the analysis demonstrates how anti-Palestinian racism in Australia is connected to local and global racist systems.

The findings of the report are analysed in six sections:

1. Repression;
2. Penalising and discipline;
3. Vilification and normalisation of racism;
4. Breaches of policy;
5. Racism limiting critical pedagogies;
6. Impact of racism.



Child wears keffiyeh during the 'Children's Press Conference for Palestine' Naarm, 24 November 2024. Image: Angelita Biscotti

The following summarises the findings under each of these sections.

1. Repression

Teachers and students (or their parent/guardian) reported a number of instances where discussion of Palestine was shut down in schools. This included when teachers handed out flyers to their colleagues for solidarity events with Palestine, and when students talked about Palestine in class, chose it as a topic for a project, or wore clothing or badges with a connection to Palestine. Teachers also reported being told not to show connection or solidarity with Palestine through their clothing or badges. Reasons for these directives offered by school authorities included other members of the community feeling 'uncomfortable' and 'offended' by the discussion or representation of Palestine, or that schools are supposed to be places of 'neutrality' and 'objectivity'. These justifications were used to silence and censor views and experiences, and left students and staff fearful about engaging in important and open conversations about the political situation in Palestine, and Israeli violence towards Palestinians. Teachers, expected to abide by western 'neutrality' and post-racial harmony in their work rather than touch 'unsafe' topics, are penalised for enacting critical pedagogies that challenge the boundaries set by the hegemonic settler curriculum.

2. Penalising and disciplining teachers and students

Many respondents reported being disciplined or penalised for expression of Palestinian culture or solidarity with Palestinians and their struggle against Israeli violence and occupation. Teachers publicly supporting Palestine were, for example, yelled at, sent a written directive to remove a Palestine sticker and badge, sent home, asked to remove a T-shirt, restricted in their movement around the school, not offered a new contract; casuals were denied work. One student was reported to the Australian Jewish Association for writing a monologue for a play performed prior to 7 October. Other students had Palestinian flags confiscated during a multicultural day celebration. There were many more examples.

3. Vilification and normalisation of racism

Many of the reports to the Register demonstrated instances of vilification and normalisation of anti-Palestinian racism. This occurred through stereotypes, such as those that depict Palestinian people as terrorists, the idea that Palestinians deserve the violence and oppression perpetrated by the Israeli state, and the dehumanisation of Palestinians through assertion of Israeli aggression and power. There were reports of students wearing the keffiyeh being targeted by teachers, who sometimes linked this to terrorism and ‘radicalisation’, thus associating Palestinian cultural and political expression with an assumed inherent violence. These forms of vilification were part of the culture of repression occurring in schools, and contributed to the normalisation of anti-Palestinian racism.

4. Breaches of policy

There are a number of national and state declarations and policies that stipulate the need for schools to engage in education that is inclusive of diversity in all its forms. The reports made to the Register highlighted a number of occasions in which such declarations were breached through the dismissal or shutting down of expression of Palestinian culture, knowledge, history or solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom from the colonial occupation and destruction of their land, people and resources. In particular, in NSW, the silencing of Palestinian perspectives in schools is a direct breach of the ‘Controversial Issues in Schools’ policy, which directs teachers to ensure sensitivity and balance in their presentation of controversial issues, stating teachers ‘should ensure that a range of views on a subject are taken into account in designing suitable learning programs’. This was clearly not occurring in relation to Palestine where views supportive of Palestinians were being silenced.

5. Racism limiting critical pedagogies

The capacity for teachers to engage with critical pedagogies that seek to understand power and transform relations of oppression and inequality were found to be severely limited by both a lack of knowledge about Palestine among teachers, and notions of multiculturalism that exclude Palestinians. Many respondents to the register reported teachers who had little knowledge of the history or cultures of Palestine. This illiteracy limited teachers' capacity to engage with their students about the unfolding Gaza Genocide, or other issues associated with the Middle East region in the curriculum, resulting in silencing and repression. While many schools celebrate multiculturalism in their community, the racism directed towards Palestinian people during multicultural celebrations was significant and resulted in their exclusion or punishment. This limits the capacity for critical pedagogies and multicultural inclusion in schools.

6. Impacts of racism

The impacts of this anti-Palestinian racism were significant. Participants reported feeling exhausted and dehumanised by having to constantly stand up for Palestinian rights in a hostile school environment. Many participants reported feeling hurt, sad, angry and upset. Intimidation and the punitive practices that were employed by schools to shut down, silence, erase and ban symbols of and discussion about Palestine led many to feel discriminated against, overwhelmed, scared and anxious.

These experiences suggest that prevailing settler colonial ideologies in Australian schools promote hostility towards racial solidarity in education work, in this case, solidarity expressed amid the genocide of the Palestinian people. School management and the Australian state's commitment to white-informed notions of 'neutrality' and 'comfort' have contributed to, and legitimated, heightened rates of biased, unfair, discriminatory and violent workplace experiences. The experiences compiled by the Register also suggest that Australian illiteracy about the Middle East and settler colonialism is a significant factor in the use of power and control to manage dissenting perspectives in schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report (summarised above and elaborated on pp.33) and our expertise as academics within the disciplines of education and sociology, we put forward the following recommendations:

1.

Education departments, policies and institutions need to urgently focus on First Nations social justice in schools as a decolonial way of addressing all forms of institutional racism and ongoing dispossession.

This report is centred on understanding anti-Palestinian racism in the context of Australian schools. It is important, therefore, to take account of the settler colonial context of Australian education and the extensive scholarship of First Nations people who have documented the institutional racism occurring in Australian schools (see Bishop, 2020; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Brown, 2019; Fricker & Fricker, 2023; Mann, 2019; Nakata, 2002; Rigney, 2020; Rose, 2019; Sarra, 2014; Watego, 2021). Therefore, this report recommends that any response to anti-Palestinian racism in Australian schools must contend with the institutional racism produced in settler colonial contexts. This should involve the direct input of expertise of First Nations scholars and community impacted and should include training teachers on how to embed 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures' as a cross-curriculum priority. We further recommend that departments of education uphold First Nations self-determination and sovereignty in education. **Education departments, policies and institutions need to urgently focus on First Nations social justice in schools as a decolonial way of addressing all forms of institutional racism and ongoing dispossession.**

2.

In order for educational institutions to develop strategies to combat this crisis of anti-Palestinian racism, leaders in education need first to acknowledge that anti-Palestinian racism is a significant problem.

As this report has highlighted, the normalisation of anti-Palestinian racism and vilification is widespread and urgently needs to be addressed. Anti-Palestinian racism is killing Palestinians in Palestine and silencing Palestinians here. **In order for educational institutions to develop strategies to combat this crisis of anti-Palestinian racism, leaders in education need first to acknowledge that anti-Palestinian racism is a significant problem.** Educational institutions must then develop strategies to combat rising anti-Palestinian racism alongside anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism with the participation and input of affected communities. Departments of education need to work with communities to find solutions that are context responsive. As experts on their racial experiences, affected communities can guide solutions to addressing anti-Palestinian racism.

3.

Departments of education need to introduce policies and guidelines that protect the rights of students, educators and education communities to explore the Gaza Genocide and to protect their right to be critical of the ways that the Australian state is complicit in this genocide.

Educational institutions should exercise and advocate for the independence to uphold the civil and political rights of their education communities in the face of ideological pressure. Solidarity with Palestine is viewed with hostility by the Australian state, but it is the right of students, educators and members of education communities to express views that disagree with the government's backing of the Israeli-American genocidal war on Gaza. As this report has made explicit, staff and leaders in schools are openly breaching several policies and declarations by engaging in anti-Palestinian racism. **Departments of education need to introduce policies and guidelines that protect the rights of students, educators and education communities to explore the Gaza Genocide and to protect their right to be critical of the ways that the Australian state is complicit in this genocide.**

4.

Educational institutions should develop official internal policies to review white and Eurocentric curriculum perspectives. Following our first recommendation of the inclusion of First Nations content, it is vital that education moves towards curricula that represents, respects and teaches the perspectives and histories of non-western migrant groups in Australia.

The rise in anti-Palestinian racism is linked to the whiteness and Eurocentrism of the Australian curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], n.d.). As this report has highlighted, it needs to be acknowledged that the narratives of ‘discomfort’ that have been used to legitimise anti-Palestinian racism need to be contextualised in the experiences of whiteness. **Educational institutions should develop official internal policies to review white and Eurocentric curriculum perspectives. Following our first recommendation of the inclusion of First Nations content, it is vital that education moves towards curricula that represents, respects and teaches the perspectives and histories of non-western migrant groups in Australia.** The perspectives of Arab and Muslim communities concerning Palestine and Middle Eastern politics and history should be taught in schools and universities to ensure the knowledges of these minority groups are represented in the curriculum, a curriculum that claims to be multicultural yet omits marginalised perspectives. Critical teachers have taken the initiative to develop reading guides, lesson plan templates and a variety of resources to improve discussion at schools. Curriculum writers, policymakers and the teaching profession need to acknowledge that the ‘teaching profession’ cannot be ‘neutral’, ‘unbiased’ and ‘objective’. Indeed, within the Australian context, these words have been used to justify a pro-Israel position and the government’s complicity in genocide. The literature on critical pedagogy reminds educators that the teaching profession is in fact political, and that narratives concerning ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ regarding the teaching profession uphold Eurocentrism in education.

5.

Education executives and leaders need to be held accountable to workplace regulations given reports of mistreating education sector workers and misusing the workplace relation to enforce state censorship and repression.

Teacher and staff autonomy should be strengthened and defended by unions and rights organisations, especially in a time of genocide. **Education executives and leaders need to be held accountable to workplace regulations given reports of mistreating education sector workers and misusing the workplace relation to enforce state censorship and repression.** Unions have been representing teachers who have faced Palestine-related workplace repression and discipline – support for this defence is vital.

6.

We urge working with sovereign Indigenous conceptions of solidarity and diversity to develop an alternative to social cohesion policies to better conceptualise difference and diversity in school settings.

The policy of social cohesion advanced by the federal and state governments should be challenged. The concept of social cohesion has been used as a blunt instrument to silence, oppress and vilify staff and students who take a position against the Australian government's allyship with Israel. Education leaders and staff therefore need to critically examine how social cohesion policies augment white supremacy. An alternative policy framework is necessary, one that does not require upholding dominant western ideology and perspectives at the expense of already politically underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. **We urge working with sovereign Indigenous conceptions of solidarity and diversity to develop an alternative to social cohesion policies to better conceptualise difference and diversity in school settings.**

7.

Students and educators should learn about the significance of Palestinian symbols and clothing from Palestinians and Arabs, who should be respected as subject-matter authorities.

Currently, schools are silencing and repressing Palestinian symbols and cultural items, such as the Palestinian flag, watermelon and keffiyeh. In the spirit and ethos of the Mparntwe Declaration (Australian Education Council, 2019), which encourages students to be global citizens, **students and teachers should be permitted to wear Palestinian symbols and cultural items in their schools, just as students and staff are able to display other symbols and expressions of identity and solidarity.** This is a matter of cultural safety for Palestinian students, families and teachers and a matter of freedom of expression for supporters of Palestinian freedom. It should not be used by education authorities to justify discrimination and drive divisions in education communities. **Students and educators should learn about the significance of Palestinian symbols and clothing from Palestinians and Arabs, who should be respected as subject-matter authorities.**

8.

Departments of education in different states and territories should organise teacher training programs that can support them to include content about Palestine and the Gaza Genocide.

Departments of education in different states and territories should organise teacher training programs that can support them to include content about Palestine and the Gaza Genocide. It is clear that both students and teachers within educational institutions would like the opportunities to teach/learn about Palestine (Al-Natour, 2024). It is essential that schools develop programs to empower teachers to teach the connections between colonialism, racism and white supremacy, and decolonising curricula. Anti-Palestinian racism cannot be properly understood and addressed without knowledge of these connections. Indeed, doing so aligns with the goals and objectives of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, n.d.) and the Mparntwe Declaration (Australian Education Council, 2019). Students are encouraged to be active and involved citizens; ‘Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia’ remains a cross-curriculum priority that lists ‘Palestinian territories’ as ‘West Asia’.

9.

Schools should look at employing non-punitive practices that seek to engage and understand difference and enable deep engagement.

Many of the reports to the APAN Register included experiences of schools employing punitive disciplinary measures – such as banning, confiscating and excluding – against students and teachers who displayed symbols of Palestine solidarity, or who attempted to educate their school community about the injustices Palestinians are facing. Punitive discipline has been shown to be connected to the carceral practices of the settler colonial state (see Rudolph 2023) and thus tends to embed rather than counter racism. **Schools should look at employing non-punitive practices that seek to engage and understand difference and enable deep engagement.**



Woman and child wearing Palestinian tatreez during Teachers and School Staff for Palestine's 'Scholasticide Vigil' Naarm, 28 November 2024. Image: Angelita Biscotti

Introduction

The *Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools* report is the first of its kind examining anti-Palestinian racism across Australian educational institutions. Given the prevalence of attacks and punishment of staff and students who have opposed the Gaza Genocide since October 2023, and the severity of anti-Palestinian racism in mainstream media, by the major political parties, state education departments and school leaders, the necessity of this report cannot be overstated. In 2014, Nadia Barhoum wrote, ‘whether it’s in the media, academia, or government, the Palestinian cause is constantly excluded. Sympathy for Palestine is equivalent to political suicide’ (p.17). In the context of Israel’s genocidal war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since October 2023, it is obvious that despite the unprecedented levels of live-streamed violence we are witnessing; not much has changed. There is still an extremely hostile climate towards Palestinians and Palestinian testimonies and narratives across media, academia and governments. This hostility extends to Australian educational institutions.

This Register provided a simple and secure space for teachers, school support staff, and parents and guardians to report incidents of anti-Palestinian racism and discrimination in their schools, detailing how they witnessed or experienced racism, the frequency and occurrences of racism and the impacts felt and experienced.

The Anti-Palestinian Racism Register invited students, staff and families to report on occurrences of anti-Palestinian racism and discrimination in their schools. The call for this Register came from school communities who sought a platform to publicly but safely raise their concerns regarding heightened racism, as well as hold departments of education, school leadership and colleagues to account for its rise. This Register provided a simple and secure space for teachers, school support staff, and parents and guardians to report incidents of anti-Palestinian racism and discrimination in their schools, detailing how they witnessed or experienced racism, the frequency and occurrences of racism and the impacts felt and experienced. While the Register gathered stories from both school and university contexts, due to the small number of respondents sharing accounts from universities, it was decided to focus solely on schools for this report.

Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools draws attention to the systemised, widespread, urgent and relentlessness of anti-Palestinian racism across Australian schools. This report seeks to understand why anti-Palestinian racism is prevalent in Australian schools so that it can be effectively addressed. Further, this report's scope extends, though differs from, reports on the War on Terror's Islamophobia in Australian education, in that it responds specifically to understanding the impacts for minority communities in the context of the Australia-Israel alliance and the current genocide in Gaza. *Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools* documents the consequences for racialised communities and their supporters, who interact, work or study in Australian schools. These dissenting communities have found themselves, once again, as with the War on Terror, positioned as dangerous. This has led to disciplinary measures that push towards criminalisation of these communities and the curtailment of their civil liberties and educational freedom.

The experiences and observations described in this report occurred in an increasingly hostile climate whereby Australian politicians, education leaders and media pundits continuously support Israel while purporting to be 'neutral' and 'objective'. Australia is a staunch diplomatic supporter of Israel, shielding Israel from accountability, encouraging Israel's impunity at the United Nations General Assembly, Security Council, Human Rights Council and International Criminal Court. Further, Australia engages in information sharing and defence industry cooperation with Israel's military, and has entered into myriad arms, fintech, trade and other economic relationships with Israel (Australia Palestine Advocacy Network 2021).

We contextualise the findings of this report through engagement with research on and histories of settler colonialism and race in education. First Nations scholars in education have documented how the Australian curriculum maintains white, Eurocentric perspectives in the Australian curriculum, and point out that the experiences of First Nations staff and students in Australian schools is bound by racism (Bishop, 2020; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Brown, 2019; Fricker & Fricker, 2023; Mann, 2019; Nakata, 2002; Rigney, 2020; Rose, 2019; Sarra, 2014; Watego, 2021). While it is unsurprising that leaders within two settler colonial societies (Australia and Israel) share solidarity with one another, we point out how widespread anti-Palestinian racism occurs across Australian schools and is symptomatic of an education system that is structured by institutional racism. While the Australian Curriculum outlines that Australian educators are encouraged to develop Australian students as 'global citizens' and contains both 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures' as cross-curriculum priorities (ACARA, n.d.),

While it is unsurprising that leaders within two settler colonial societies (Australia and Israel) share solidarity with one another, we point out how widespread anti-Palestinian racism occurs across Australian schools and is symptomatic of an education system that is structured by institutional racism.

research suggests that white supremacy remains at the core of Australian education (see Coté, 2009; Sriprakash et al., 2022; Smith, 2024).

In a climate where leaders and politicians incessantly attack and try to silence staff and students for taking a stand against genocide, *Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools* demonstrates how teachers and students are resilient in Australian educational institutions. While this report analyses data from 84 participants, we anticipate that anti-Palestinian racism is far worse, as many other educators, school staff and families have yet to report their testimonies. In extremely hostile institutions, teachers are working to reframe official curricula to teach about Palestine and speak out against modern colonial silences, defending their rights and finding possibility within the contradictions present in the curriculum. Yet, in the face of such hostilities, teacher movements for Palestine continue to grow and school students continue to organise school strikes, demonstrating that current school leaders and educational policymakers have continued to fail in their attempts to silence, vilify and discriminate against teachers and students. The testimonies in the data we analysed suggest a significant disconnect in Australian education, whereby Australia's allyship with Israel as a fellow settler society is at odds with the positions of many teachers, school staff and students.

Three children partake in the 'Children's Press Conference for Palestine'
Naarm, 24 November 2024. Image: Angelita Biscotti



Anti-Palestinian racism

Anti-Palestinian racism is a specific form of racism that targets Palestinians and might also affect allies of Palestinians who society considers loyal to Palestinian liberation (Bakan & Abu-Laban, 2024). It interacts and overlaps with Orientalism (Said, 1978), Islamophobia (Bazian, 2015), systemic racism, anti-Arab racism and colonialism and therefore must be situated within these larger dominant sets of ideas and narratives of the Arab, Muslim, Black and Indigenous Other (Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2021).

Anti-Palestinian racism is understood as a structural form of racism, that manifests in various racial, colonial practices which deny, denigrate and/or vilify Palestine's indigenous Palestinian people (who are Arabs of diverse religious affiliations) (Majid, 2022). Saleh and Awwad (2024) summarise Majid's (2022) definitions of anti-Palestinian racism, highlighting how it has many forms including: 'Nakba denial; justifying violence against Palestinians; not acknowledging Palestinians as an indigenous peoples; eliding the dignity of Palestinians; excluding or pressuring others to exclude the presence and/or perspectives of Palestinians; and, defaming Palestinians and allies with slander such as being inherently antisemitic, violent or terrorist threats/sympathizers' (p.15). Further, Saleh and Awwad (2024) point out that while 'recently named as a distinct form of racism, anti-Palestinian racism is not new. It is rooted in historical and ongoing euro-western racial religious supremacy, settler-colonial logics, Orientalist dehumanisation and Zionist mythologies' (p.15).

Anti-Palestinian racism is grounded in the colonial dynamic of oppression from coloniser to colonised but also relates to Islamophobia, which is also a permanent and structural form of racism within Australian and western societies. The post-10/7 political climate has exposed how Islamophobia makes possible the defence of Israeli genocidal violence (Sammak, Ghumkhor & Mohamud, 2023). Islamophobia should be understood as a global, racial structure. The following comprehensive definition of Islamophobia is from the Islamophobia Research & Documentation Project (IRDP) an initiative of the Centre for Race & Gender at the University of California Berkeley:

Islamophobia is a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structures. It is directed at a perceived or real threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise). Islamophobia reintroduces and

reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended (IDRP, 2021).

Further, the instances of anti-Palestinian racism detailed in this report are from the testimonies of both Palestinians and non-Palestinians within Australian schools. Abu-Laban and Bakan (2022) note that,

Non-Palestinians who engage in Palestine solidarity – including growing numbers of Jewish allies – may also experience elements of backlash and related harm. We view this as a spillover effect stemming from the virulence of anti-Palestinian racism and racial gaslighting but would not consider non-Palestinians to experience anti-Palestinian racism per se. Put differently, it might be observed that Palestine solidarity activists become identified when they stand with a disempowered and maligned group. They may also be punished as a warning to others. However anti-Palestinian racism specifically targets Palestinians (p.510).

These definitions inform the analysis process of this report and its recommendations that compel us to look towards curriculum change and address the structures which allow racism to manifest in Australian education.

Scope and methodology

This investigation into anti-Palestinian racism in Australian education began with a call from Palestinian diaspora communities in various Australian states/territories to document instances of racism they had been experiencing at an increasing level since October 2023. There were also a number of high-profile incidents of discrimination against Palestinian people and supporters of Palestinian justice, with educational institutions were identified as sites where anti-Palestinian racism occurs frequently. APAN, therefore, urgently set up the Register for teachers, parents and students to report anti-Palestinian racism they experienced or witnessed in education settings. This Register was also set up as an initial step towards understanding and addressing anti-Palestinian racism in education. The Register was opened on 8 March 2024 and remains open. This report analyses data (84 reports) collected from 8 March 2024 to 7 July 2024.

The Register was housed on the APAN website and, from 14 May 2024, the Australian Human Rights Commission website. APAN invited respondents to submit their experiences to the Register through a range of social media and public statements. The Register included demographic questions and 10 open-ended questions about the participant's experiences of racism in schools. These questions asked participants to describe what, when and where the racism occurred, who was there, how others responded, whether they reported the incident and whether action was taken to address it. They were also asked to describe how the incident had affected them. Participants were verified as they were asked to list their name, contact details, state or territory and postcode.

Participants ranged from teachers and education support staff in schools, to parents, family members and family friends, and students within education communities. There were 16 responses from university settings and 84 responses from school settings (including one early childhood setting). As the Register was set up to look at anti-Palestinian racism in schools, it received a lower number of responses from university and early childhood education settings. We decided to focus only on the responses from early childhood through to school education in this report. A more thorough investigation into anti-Palestinian racism in universities and early childhood settings is required.

Respondents included in this report came mainly from New South Wales, 49 respondents, and Victoria, 29 respondents. There were three from Queensland, one from each of Western Australia and the Northern Territory, two from the ACT, and four from South Australia. This is not reflective of whether anti-Palestinian racism is only a significant problem in Victoria and New South Wales, but rather reflective of the reality that knowledge about the Register was more common in more highly populated states.

Nineteen respondents reported an incident in a private or independent education setting and 70 reported an incident in a public or government education setting. Twenty-eight incidents were reported in a primary school setting, one in an early childhood education setting, seven in a primary and secondary school setting, and 53 in a secondary school setting. Eight respondents were non-teaching staff in schools, 35 were a parent or guardian of a child in school, 40 were teachers, four were secondary school students, one participant identified themselves as a 'family friend' and one participant identified themselves as a 'community member'.

APAN engaged Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah to assemble a team of academics (Dr Ryan Al-Natour, Dr Sophie Rudolph, Ms Tasnim Mahmoud Sammak) with expertise in education, sociology and anti-racism to analyse and report on the experiences shared through the Register. Names and identifying information of participants has been withheld to ensure confidentiality is maintained to the greatest extent possible.

Racism and the settler colonial context of schooling

The instances of anti-Palestinian racism experienced by educators, school staff and students detailed in this report should be situated in Australia's education context as one built for a white settler colonial society. Settler colonialism is described as a form of colonialism in which colonists invade and occupy the lands of Indigenous peoples and proceed to make a home upon these stolen lands (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The legacies of colonialism – such as domination, assimilation, exclusion and racism – become enduring parts of the settler colonial society. Geonpul scholar, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) calls these white possessive logics: referring to the ways that the settler colonial state and its institutions claim land, knowledge, history and safety as white possessions. Dja Dja Wurrung scholars, Fricker and Fricker (2023), argue: 'Every aspect of the Australian education system is a colonial construct, which was established across the continent and adjacent islands as part of the ongoing British colonisation process' (p.3).

Within settler colonial societies, educational institutions operate to support assimilationist agendas of colonialism and of upholding racial domination over Indigenous peoples. For example, Pihama and Lee-Morgan (2019) outline how colonial schooling in societies across Oceania, the Americas and Africa was used as part of a 'civilising' project by colonists. Schooling was therefore used to promote false ideas of a racial hierarchy, laying the foundations for the dominance of imported European ideas and knowledge. As Halabi (2024, p.61) writes, colonialism entails not only 'the control of land and natural resources, but also control of the discourse and control of a native people's thought and will'. This can still be seen in contemporary schools in Australia, where young people report that history lessons are taught in ways that silence the long history of Indigenous people in Australia (Brown, 2019).

Schooling practices that encompass colonial techniques such as domination, silencing, erasure, dismissal, censorship and denial are often expressed through the curriculum. The Australian curriculum is considered to be a liberal, democratic curriculum, yet it operates as a tool of control. It transmits, reproduces and protects the state's national interests. As a settler colonial state, these national interests include protecting white dominance

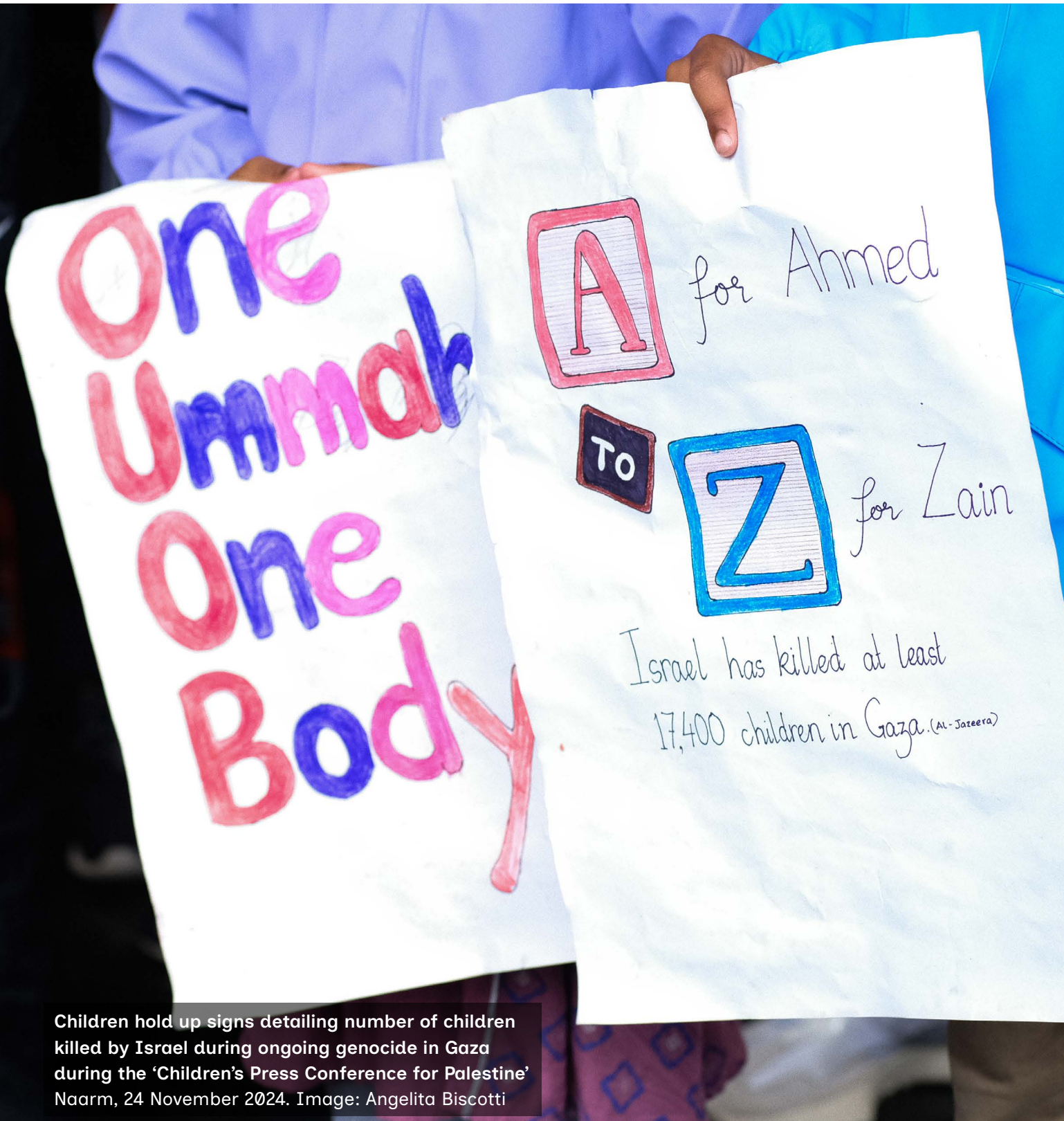
(see Sriprakash et al., 2022). Others have also identified the ways that Indigenous people are positioned as deficit in curriculum and policy and how racialised failure has been constructed (see Fricker et al., 2023; Hogarth, 2017; Rudolph, 2018), tying into narratives of European superiority and a schooling system designed to 'civilise' the Indigenous Other. As Gamilaroi scholar Michelle Bishop (2021, p.421) has pointed out, schools and curricula operating in these assimilatory and dominating ways in Australia are 'part of an imperial agenda'. Munanjahli and South Sea Islander academic Chelsea Watego (2021) argues that First Nations children are academically assessed through educational institutions that force them 'into sympathising with, and standing in solidarity with, the coloniser standpoint' (p.31) within schools. Whether here or in the state of Israel, curriculum content is created within settler colonial institutions to enable these ongoing and intersecting settler colonial projects (see Calleja et al., 2024).

While settler colonial practices of oppression and occupation specifically target Indigenous populations, the racialised system that is produced in these states also discriminates against other racialised minorities. Within white-led settler colonial projects around the globe, it is increasingly common that racialised settlers are targeted in racist expressions of moral panic and outrage. In Aotearoa, racialised settlers of colour continue to experience racism (Ali, 2021; Ng, 2015) within the colonial project that is New Zealand, as Islamophobia continues to rise in the aftermath of the Christchurch massacres in 2019 (Hussein, Allen & Poynting, 2024).

In each of these contexts, we see how race can morph to accommodate a range of targets for racism in the settler colonial state (see Abdel-Fattah, 2021; Goldberg, 2009; Sammak, 2024; Sriprakash et al., 2022). This occurs through a process of dehumanisation that likens the Other to animals (see Hage, 2017), builds fear and suspicion around the racialised Other (see Abdel-Fattah, 2021), positions young Black and/or Arab people as dangerous and criminal (see Abdel-Fattah, 2021; Al-Natour, 2010; Majavu, 2020), and disciplines protest or resistance of the settler colonial narrative (see Rudolph, 2023; Sriprakash et al., 2022).

Australian multicultural policy regulates migrant young people's political viewpoints through the demand to integrate, rather than afford them the freedom of political expression in educational settings and the workplace. The state's concept of social cohesion and harmony requires an accommodation of dominant perspectives, it requires conformity. Young people face the incredible pressure and pain associated with these racist demands to 'integrate' into white Australia. This might be summarised in one particularly poignant comment from an African diaspora young person, 'I do all this [being a good citizen to fit in] and yet I keep hearing I must integrate and then I realise, (pause) If I peel off my Black skin maybe then I integrate' (Uptin, 2021, p.85). This shows how young people in schools must confront

a settler colonial state that requires conditional inclusion (see Rudolph & Thomas, 2023). It is important that we situate the current hostility and racism against the Palestinian community and educators who take a position against the unfolding genocide as deeply disturbing but, perhaps, unsurprising, as educational institutions tend to have a shared solidarity with whiteness that protects the state's imperial policies.



Children hold up signs detailing number of children killed by Israel during ongoing genocide in Gaza during the 'Children's Press Conference for Palestine' Naarm, 24 November 2024. Image: Angelita Biscotti

Australian education policy and curriculum context

The official settler-colonial Australian curriculum and state curricula operate through a liberal multiculturalist framework. Current education policies outline commitment to democratic ideals, global citizenship, human rights and equality. It is these same enforced curricula notions that maintain the transmission of white dominance in school settings while seemingly making progress towards a better Australia.

The Australian F-10 Curriculum Version 9.0 (the Australian Curriculum) is structured into three key dimensions: learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities. The Australian Curriculum claims to 'prepare young people for the future world in which they will learn and to respond to the challenges that will continue to shape their world'. It 'sets out the essential knowledge, understanding and skills students need to learn and the expected quality of that learning'. State and territory education authorities and non-government sectors and schools determine the timeline and use of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, n.d.).

Various aims speak to the themes of culture, belonging and global engagement, such as aims to ensure that students develop 'a sense of wonder, curiosity and respect about places, people, cultures and systems throughout the world, past and present' and the 'dispositions required for effective participation in everyday life, now and in the future'. The Australian Curriculum claims to 'recognise the entitlement of young Australians to knowledge, understanding and skills that will help them become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners and active and informed members of the community' (ACARA n.d.).

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration claims to build on the success of the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. The declaration is based on two goals: first, 'the Australian education system promotes excellence and equity' (Australian Education Council 2019, p.5), and, second, 'all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community' (Australian Education Council 2019, p.6). The Declaration seeks to encourage students to become 'active and informed members of the community who', among other goals, 'are committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate in

Australia's civic life by connecting with their community and contributing to local and national conversations'(Australian Education Council 2019, p.8).

In Australian schools, matters concerning multiculturalism, discrimination, race and anti-racism are addressed across various federal frameworks including 'Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful' (2017), the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and *Racial Hatred Act (1995)*.

As discussed above, most of the submissions to the Register came from people based in NSW and Victoria. We therefore provide a brief overview of the current policy and curriculum contexts of these states below to enable greater understanding of the results from the survey.

New South Wales

NSW state policies and legislation include the *Multicultural NSW Act (2000)*, *NSW Anti-Discrimination Act (1977)* and Multicultural Policies and Services Program (Multicultural NSW, 2025), and NSW Department of Education policies. Of particular concern for the issue of Anti-Palestinian racism are three current NSW Department of Education policies: 'Controversial Issues in Schools', 'Support in Times of Crisis' and 'Values in NSW Public Schools'.

In 2007, the New South Wales Education Department introduced the Controversial Issues in Schools policy (NSW Department of Education, 2025a). It has been a key document cited in managing pro-Palestinian speech in school settings since the genocide began in October 2023. The policy and procedures do not provide examples of material that may be deemed 'controversial'. Instead, a broad definition is offered as follows:

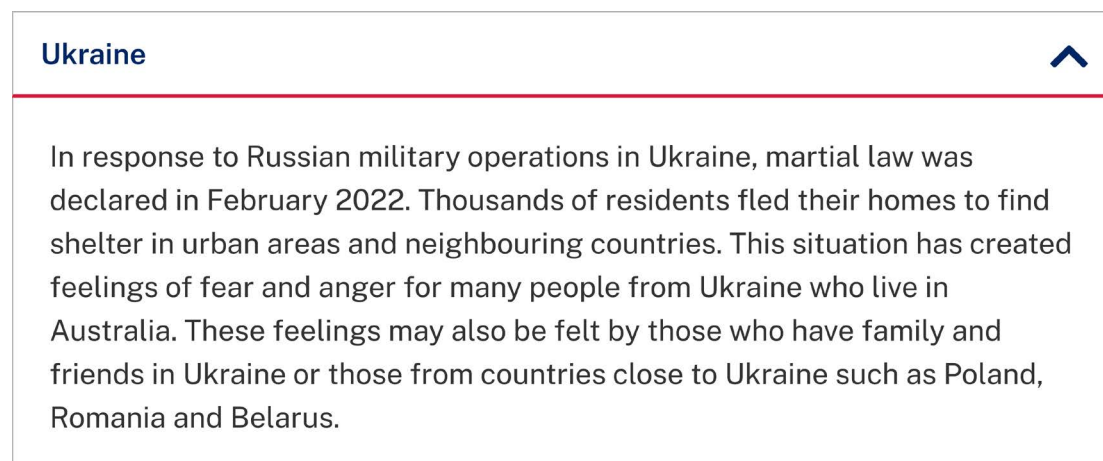
questions, subjects, topics or problems which create a difference of opinion, causing contention and debate within the school or the community. Controversial issues will differ across schools and communities. Controversial issues may arise in the content delivered and views expressed by or the actions of teachers, external providers or visiting speakers in school or on excursions. Teaching approaches to controversial issues need to be sensitive, objective and balanced. They should ensure that a range of views on a subject are taken into account in designing suitable learning programs. Welcome to Country and/or the acknowledgement of traditional owners is not considered a controversial issue. Schools are not places to proselytise, that is, to convert students who are not already members of a particular belief system to become members of that belief system. Schools should not be used to advance political platforms or for recruiting into partisan groups organised upon restricted party lines (NSW Department of Education, 2025a).

The policy stipulates that schools must do ‘what they reasonably can to protect students from foreseeable risk of harm arising from school related activities’ and sets out the ‘appropriate’ way for schools to ‘manage’ the ‘study of controversial issues’ to ‘provide valuable and significant learning experiences’ (NSW Department of Education, 2025a). The procedures stipulate how to ‘manage’ controversial issues in relation to curriculum, excursions, student organised activities, visitors and external providers, official visitors, members of parliament, flag presentations, speech and presentation events and the distribution of material (NSW Department of Education, 2025a).

The NSW Department of Education’s website offers guidelines for ‘Support in Times of Crisis’ (NSW Department of Education, 2025b). The Department notes that ‘given the ties that many students and their families have to countries overseas, there may be times when they are affected by international social and political crises such as civil unrest and war’. There are three headings listed under ‘current conflicts’: the Middle East, Ukraine and Afghanistan (NSW Department of Education, 2025c).

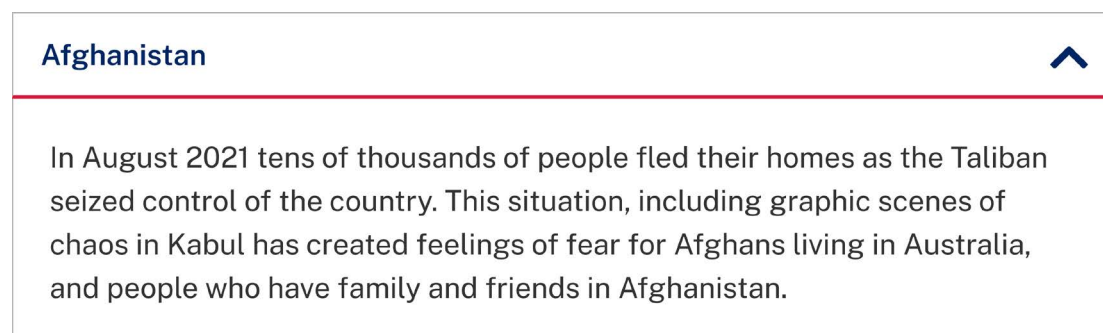
There is a stark difference in the narrative framing and language choice in the Department’s introductory comments for each of these ‘conflicts.’

In relation to Ukraine, the department explains:



(Image from NSW Department of Education, 2025c).

In relation to Afghanistan, the department explains:



(Image from NSW Department of Education, 2025c).

In both preambles, the Department names the aggressor (Russia; the Taliban) and the victims (Ukrainians and Afghans). The active voice is used, and there is clear cause and effect: Russian military operations caused Ukrainian residents to flee their homes, find shelter; the Taliban seizing control of Afghanistan caused Afghans to flee their homes. Emotive language is used to convey the victims' point of view – 'feelings of fear and anger'; 'graphic scenes of chaos' (NSW Department of Education, 2025c).

The contrast with the introduction to the 'Middle East' is stark.

Middle East



The current conflict in the Middle East continues to cause distress within our communities and schools. The following resources may assist:

(Image from NSW Department of Education, 2025c).

Palestine, Gaza, or Israel are not even named. Instead, the Department collapses the parties into the vague regional description of 'the Middle East' (NSW Department of Education, 2025c). Unlike Afghanistan and Ukraine, no background context is offered. The phrase 'current conflict' conveys the message that this is an intractable conflict between two 'equal' sides, shielding Israel from being named as the occupier and coloniser. The difference in approach clearly exposes the Department's ideological orientations and biases, despite posturing as 'neutral'.

The NSW Government *Values in NSW Public Schools policy (2020)* sets out the Department's approach to values education. The policy stipulates that public schools should provide opportunities for students to explore 'the values that lie behind diverse community attitudes to political issues and social concerns'. The core values include care, fairness, the promotion of a just society, being active citizens of Australia and the world, and empowering individuals to become active participants in the democratic processes of Australian society.

Victoria

Victorian schools are governed by a range of policies that aim to ensure inclusive and safe education experiences (Victorian Department of Education, 2024b). The Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* is the overarching guide for all government departments and authorities: 'government schools, school councils and Department corporate staff are all public authorities under the Charter'. The 2023–2027 Cultural Diversity plan outlines the 'proactive steps the department is taking to build cultures of respect and belonging and strengthen diversity and inclusion in the department's workforce and all early education and school settings'.

The Victorian Curriculum adopts the Intercultural Capability curriculum. Officially, it is outlined that ‘the Intercultural capability curriculum enables students to explore their own and others’ cultural practices and cultural diversity in Australian society’. The curriculum also states that it ‘promotes mutual respect and social cohesion and helps students to develop vital skills for living and working in a multicultural world’.

The Victorian Government has developed resources for educators through platforms such as Arc (Victorian Department of Education, n.d.), which defines itself as ‘the Department of Education’s digital platform that provides Victorian teachers with access to curriculum-aligned resources, professional learning opportunities, and safe and reliable software and technologies’. Arc has Global Learning and Engagement Intercultural Capability units that are promoted as assisting educators with meeting the Intercultural capability curriculum where teachers are invited to ‘grab students’ attention by examining what’s going on in the world around them’ (Victorian Department of Education, n.d.).

There is also a department guide for selecting appropriate teaching and learning materials. This policy stipulates: ‘Schools must ensure that teaching and learning resources provide students with challenging and engaging programs that do not offend students or the wider school community due to their obscene, offensive or controversial nature’ (Victorian Department of Education, 2023). Controversial topics are anticipated in the Victorian policy on selecting appropriate teaching and learning materials, however, there is little guidance offered. Instead, a three-stage process is outlined for how to respond to parent objections to teaching and learning materials. This leaves little room for considering how the curriculum may already be biased or how it is impossible for teaching to be objective (see Morgan, 2017; Rizvi et al., 2006).

In November 2023, the state department of education issued a directive to all teachers in state schools about ‘political activities and community activism’. In this directive teachers were reminded of their obligations under the Victorian Public Sector Code of Conduct (Victorian Department of Education, 2024a) and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) Code of Conduct (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2025). In particular, this Department of Education drew teachers’ attention to two points in the VIT Code of Conduct: teachers should ‘interact with learners without displaying bias or preference’ and should ‘keep their personal agendas separate from their learning environment’ (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2025).

Findings

After closely analysing the testimonies submitted to the Register, the findings of this report highlight the extent of anti-Palestinian racism and how it manifests in Australian educational institutions. The findings are discussed under the following themes: 1) repression; 2) penalisation and discipline; 3) vilification and normalisation of racism; 4) breaches of policy; 5) racism limiting critical pedagogies; and 6) impacts of racism. The quotes reported in this section are reproduced verbatim from the Register.

Repression

The reports to the Register detailed information about the repression of Palestinian history, existence, and solidarity with the Palestinian struggle in Australian school environments. Repression occurred through silencing and censorship, whereby school leaders and authorities banned the wearing of Palestinian cultural items and discussion of Palestine in staff rooms, classrooms and school playgrounds. Further, these school leaders and authorities tended to weaponize terms such as ‘objectivity’, ‘neutrality’, ‘unbiased’, and ‘discomfort’ to repress content or discussions about Palestine.

Silencing and censorship for teaching or discussing Palestine

In Westernised schooling systems, there is ‘a great deal of silencing and labelling when Palestinians and their allies have tried to speak out about the atrocities happening in Palestine, or shed light on the struggle for freedom and liberation of Palestinians’ (Mousa & Pegios, 2024, p.40). As Barhoum (2014, p.17) argues, the ‘systemic censorship of any Palestinian perspective or story that humanizes Palestinians renders them invisible to the public’. In their work as diaspora Palestinian educators living in Turtle Island, Saleh & Awwad (2024) explain how silencing and censorship are common experiences of systemic anti-Palestinian racism within Canadian schools, with educators reporting that silencing ‘mainly through teachers or administrators shutting down their attempts to discuss Palestine’ (p.16). These experiences in Canadian schools are paralleled in Australian education systems, whereby both educators and stakeholders within schooling communities reported the frequency of silencing and censorship.

There were many stories among respondents in the Register that demonstrated how widespread silencing and censorship occurs across Australian

schools. One secondary teacher reported they witnessed a colleague at their school being asked aggressively by their head teacher to immediately remove their keffiyeh; another educator was told that wearing a Palestine 'badge would create an "unsafe" school environment'. A Palestinian educator reported being censored from discussing or sharing anything about their heritage or Palestine. Another Palestinian educator told of how they experienced anti-Palestinian racism through censorship of the expression of their cultural identity:

My principal asked me to come and see her at her office afterschool on a Friday. It was to tell me that a parent has complained that I wore a keffiyeh to school the day prior and she was offended to see it. She is an Israeli and her family has had to flee Israel due to the conflict. I do not teach her child, she only saw me in passing. I explained that my family had also fled Palestine & I had been deeply distressed by what was happening there. I explained that it was my grandmother's scarf, I considered it a beautiful scarf and wore it purely for my own comfort. I had not worn anything with a political statement or said anything EVER about my Palestinian heritage or political views at school. The principal stated that nonetheless, it had upset a parent & asked me not to wear it again.

A non-Palestinian educator at a secondary public school was attacked for wearing a keffiyeh by another staff member and recalled having to explain that the Palestinian scarf was of cultural significance:

After a school staff member was asked to take off the keffiyeh (she had worn it daily for 4 weeks no one said anything) the deputy came into our staffroom and said that in the morning there would be a staff meeting about it. I said why? She said 'cos someone was wearing something that was a political statement. I said but the Palestinian scarf represents the people of Palestine, like the olive trees and fishing nets ... She then said to me, Why do you care, you're not Palestinian. I said because I'm human and there is a genocide happening. She said, 'It's not a genocide. Do you even know the history of it?' (In a very condescending way.) I said yes that I had been very interested in the matter and I had read up on it all and educated myself.

Participants also described being asked by senior staff and principals to remove Palestine flag pins. As one casual primary school teacher reported, their Palestine flag pin was targeted but nothing was said about their supporting the LGBTQIA+ community through their symbols:

one teacher walked into my class and told me that I had to remove my lanyard which was tucked away in my jumper. She was very confrontational and was speaking in front of all the children so I didn't want to

argue in front of them. She said that several students were extremely distressed about my political statement and felt threatened ... When I stated that I had a right to wear what I wished and that it was not against government regulations she simply stated that I should remove it. Underneath that I had my company lanyard which also had the logo of the LGBT community and she didn't object to that or comment on it. She refused to answer me when I asked who had requested I remove it. I wrote an email to [the casual teaching agency] regarding the incident. I do not believe they will be supporting me in this matter. I am extremely upset as after the incident several other teachers walked into the classroom to check whether I'd removed the lanyard.

Teachers also witnessed senior staff targeting students for wearing Palestinian flag pins. One participant explained how an assistant principal at a primary school saw a student in the school playground wearing a Palestinian flag, approached them and demanded they to remove it. This witness explained that they contacted this student and explained that she did not know the school's policy about wearing flags and would follow up with the assistant principal about the matter. Upon following up, this witness reported that they were ignored when they were asked which policy prohibited the student from wearing a Palestine flag. Another secondary teacher reported that on four occasions, other teachers demanded that students 'remove Palestinian flags from their bags, keffiyehs and any symbol pertaining to the support of Palestine'.

Another participant explained a distressing and intimidating experience of receiving a written directive by their principal to remove a Palestine sticker and watermelon badge from their clothes. Even during a primary school classroom activity where students were colouring in different flags (including the flag of Palestine), staff were told not to discuss anything about Palestine. One non-teaching staff member witnessed educators being told to remove Palestinian flags, which were replaced by Israeli ones within the school, reporting 'it took a mental toll on me because I couldn't understand what world I was living in. How is it okay to take down a Palestinian flag? But put up an Israeli flag instead?'. Evidently, the Australian schooling environment is one whereby censorship, silencing and erasure is a common experience underlined by anti-Palestinian racism. As one primary school teacher explained:

One non-teaching staff member witnessed educators being told to remove Palestinian flags, which were replaced by Israeli ones within the school, reporting 'it took a mental toll on me because I couldn't understand what world I was living in. How is it okay to take down a Palestinian flag? But put up an Israeli flag instead?'.

The main problem is that nobody feels comfortable speaking about this catastrophic situation in Gaza. If somebody even tries to have a conversation with me then they whisper and keep looking behind their

shoulder. This may not be direct anti-Palestine racism but it certainly is a form of racism. The department put out a memo to principals around discussing any concerns anybody had on the LAST day of school 2023. This has made me feel ashamed of the public system I have always tried to support and encourage families to continue to enrol their children in Public Education. Sadly our silence is not helping the people who watch the main media understand the truth of what is occurring in 2024!

This comment demonstrates the fear that is produced when people are working and interacting in hostile institutions driven by repression. This teacher described the silencing and self-censorship that can occur when discussion of Palestine and expression of cultural symbols and political beliefs are curtailed.

Parents and guardians similarly reported that educators would silence their children for discussing Palestine in classrooms. In October and November of 2023, several parents and guardians with students in high schools across NSW reported that they were asked not to discuss Palestine or express public solidarity through clothing within the school. In another report at a public primary school in NSW, a student was told by their principal and the leadership teaching team that discussing the issues presently occurring in Palestine was 'not permitted'. Similarly, students in a primary school in NSW were yelled at by their teacher for colouring in the Palestinian flag and for using black, white, red and green (colours on the Palestine flag) in a Ramadan sketch activity. These students were told 'that flag is for home', and the teacher directed the students to colour in the Australian flag instead. Another teacher in a different school recalled a similar experience:

Students in a primary school in NSW were yelled at by their teacher for colouring in the Palestinian flag and for using black, white, red and green (colours on the Palestine flag) in a Ramadan sketch activity.

During an art class students were told to choose a building from around the world to draw. Two primary aged students chose to draw Al Aqsa with the flag of Palestine on the top. The art teacher scribbled on the flag and said that it shouldn't be there. They were then told to start their artwork again. Both girls felt uncomfortable by the teacher's reaction and reported the situation to me. I reported it to the principal.

A parent contacted the Register and expressed that they were extremely 'disappointed that the future generation cannot talk about humanity and current world incidents' because of schools silencing and shutting down conversation about what is happening to Palestinians. Another parent similarly noted that this environment of censorship had made students fearful to discuss the topic of Palestine in schools.

‘Neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ as pedagogies of repression

Since Israel’s genocidal war on the Gaza Strip began in October 2023, politicians from major political parties, right-wing fringe organisations, departments of education and Zionist lobby groups, have argued that discussion or teaching about Palestine in schools compromises the teaching profession’s ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’ (Andrewartha, 2024; Sky News, 2023, SBS News, 2023). The view that the teaching profession is ‘unbiased’ and ‘neutral’ has been disputed by teacher education academics (Al-Natour, Windle & McDonald., 2024). In contrast to popular myths about the teaching profession as an act of neutrality, Calleja et al. (2024, p.369) argue that education ‘is a political act, and perhaps particularly political in settler colonial states established through the occupation and oppression of Indigenous land and people’. The view that teaching is ‘apolitical’, ‘neutral’ or an ‘objective’ practice is critiqued by Henry Giroux, who explains how such views maintain pedagogies of repression. Giroux (2016) states ‘the notion of a neutral, objective education is an oxymoron. Education and pedagogy do not exist outside of relations of power, values, and politics ... Pedagogy is never innocent’. The testimonies of educators and families who contacted the Register highlighted how the pedagogies of repression are active across Australian schools. Specifically, respondents highlighted how narratives regarding ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ were used as grounds to limit student’s expressions of solidarity and silence educators at several schools.

An educator at a school in southwestern Sydney attended a meeting where the ‘principal went on about needing to remain neutral and not wear any symbols of religion’. At this same meeting, supposedly ‘neutral’ staff were contesting the idea that a genocide is taking place in Palestine:

they proceeded to ask me ‘what the problem was’ and I was like ‘well, there’s a genocide happening and I think it’s silly we can’t show support by wearing the scarf.’ Anyway they went on about not believing the images we’re seeing on social media as they are probably ‘fake’ and we have to just use safe respectable sources like the UN sites, etc. It was ridiculous.

Respondents often reported how narratives of education being ‘apolitical’, ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ were methods to shut down teachers and students who mentioned Palestine. For example, a primary school educator reported that their principal demanded they remove their shirt featuring the colours on the flag of Palestine. This educator explained, ‘I didn’t have a change of clothes so I was told to cover it or wear the shirt inside out ... They said it was against department code of conduct to wear anything political.’ A non-teaching staff member at a secondary school noted how staff were

permitted to wear Israeli flag/pins, but both staff and students were targeted and labelled as 'political' for anything related to Palestine:

I was approached by a schoolteacher in early 2024 and told there were students writing 'Free Palestine' on whiteboards around the school. I was requested to remind my students that, if it was any of them who wrote those words, to please stop doing so as they cannot be involved in political matters. Apparently a humanitarian disaster and crisis in Palestine is classified in Australia as a political matter. (And yet when there are floods, fires and droughts throughout Australia that the politicians happily get involved in and ask for the community to pitch in and donate, that is not a political matter.) I have however seen teachers wearing a badge/pin of the Israeli flag, without being told they should not do so as it was a political matter they should not get themselves involved in. Double standards? Hypocrisy? Indeed they are.

At a secondary girls' school in southwest Sydney, a teacher reported how another teacher who publicly identified herself as 'pro-Israel' had attacked a student's creative writing piece about Gaza, took issue with the use of the word 'genocide' and claimed it was 'problematic' because teachers need to take a 'neutral stance'. This teacher then witnessed this same educator remove the student from the class and speak to them about their piece in ways that intimidated them. After a complaint was made about this incident, the Head of English within the school told the student 'because [of department policy] we have to remain neutral on this conflict'. Another educator at a different secondary school with a concentrated Arab and Muslim student population similarly reported that they were attacked by another staff member because,

I had 'picked a side' when instead I should 'remain impartial' and remove my keffiyeh. I asked what the two sides were as it was clear to me that a genocide was unfolding. He said, 'There are people being killed and people doing the killing, you've picked a side of the people being killed.'

It is clear that the use of narratives of being 'political', 'neutral' and 'un-biased' are methods of repressing Palestine in schools.

The need for ‘pedagogies of discomfort’

Similar to narratives concerning ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’, data obtained in the Register had detailed that school authorities and educators would use terms such as ‘discomfort’ or ‘uncomfortable’ in their efforts to repress Palestine content and discussion in schools. These findings point to the need for educators to understand the value of pedagogies of discomfort. There is a longstanding body of work on the value of pedagogies of discomfort in teaching about histories of oppression and hegemonic social relations (see Boler, 1999, Zembylas & Boler, 2002, Zembylas, 2015). Head (2020) demonstrates the important educative opportunities opened through ‘learning to live with discomfort’, which can ‘invoke a productive, reflexive and ethical attitude in our relations to the world’ (p. 86). Further, Head (2020) suggests, through research with university students in the United States, pedagogies of discomfort are well suited to:

Facilitating discussions around the politics and history of Israel–Palestine [which] reveals and challenges existing – often multigenerational – emotional investments on one side or another. Similarly, as illustrated in the student reflections, classroom discussions of our educational backgrounds and how, in different European countries, we were taught about historical events such as the Holocaust reveals emotional commitments deeply embedded in forms of national identity. (p.86)

Head (2020) points out how in Western classrooms, the inevitability of pedagogies of discomfort is part of any truth-telling about the historical and current events across Palestine. Within the Australian curriculum, students learn about the Holocaust as part of the history curriculum and English teachers often use texts concerning the Holocaust in secondary education to educate about these challenging world events (specifically taught in History, years 7–10) (ACARA, n.d.). Further, Australian students can learn about the experiences of starvation and torture among Australian prisoners of war in Japan during World War II. In recent times, the introduction of ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures’ as a cross-curriculum priority has offered teachers opportunities to incorporate content that challenges the narrative that Australia was peacefully settled, and teaches that white Australia has led a genocide against First Nations peoples. The introduction of this cross-curriculum priority has, however, received racist backlashes concerning the efforts of truth-telling in Australian history (Rigney, 2020; Rose, 2019). This demonstrates the racialised aspect of the curriculum and education system; some uncomfortable histories and curriculum content is deemed ‘acceptable’ whilst others are seen as ‘threatening’.

In their attempts to repress Palestine, school leaders and authorities have appropriated narratives of discomfort to limit students’ critical-thinking

Students also reported they were not allowed to choose Palestine as a topic for their school projects or assessments

skills. Specifically, teachers and staff who submitted to the Register often cited that they were told by school authorities that others are not 'comfortable' with staff wearing their keffiyehs at school 'as it's triggering for some staff', or how they became aware of other 'staff discomfort, but [were] not told directly that the pro-Palestinian stand was a problem'. A teacher at a private school explained how they were told that 'wearing a Palestinian flag made other people uncomfortable and there had been complaints'. One secondary educator reported that they were sent home without due process for putting up flyers about Palestine in a staff room, and their principal suggested that they were causing 'discomfort' to staff. In another example, a teacher spoke of how their principal logged a Work Health and Safety Incident with the Department of Education simply because they had handed out pamphlets for a Teachers for Palestine group. This teacher was told that their support for Palestine had made another educator 'feel unsafe'. Teachers and staff reported being expected to comply to ensure the comfort of others was accommodated, regardless of the breaches this request posed to their sense of freedom and comfort.

Similarly, narratives concerning 'discomfort' were used to restrict or silence students who developed critical-thinking skills regarding Palestine. Several parents and guardians reported that students were not allowed to talk about Palestine nor express solidarity through clothing, badges or otherwise. Students also reported they were not allowed to choose Palestine as a topic for their school projects or assessments, highlighting how schools have attempted to quash critical thought regarding Palestine. For instance, in an independent school in Victoria, a student distributing 'Free Palestine' stickers to her friends that were obtained at the weekly protests was reprimanded by their teacher, who claimed '[the school] is not the place to distribute these stickers', 'that it can upset some students and many families feel 'uncomfortable' and 'students should not learn about world events from other students'. In a similar incident, a teacher asked a student to remove the keffiyeh, stating, 'It may be intimidating and threatening to other students and make them uncomfortable.' In an incident that a student reported to the Register, a teacher had asked them, 'Are you making a political statement with that thing on your head?'. When the student replied that it is part of their culture and explained the meaning of the keffiyeh, the teacher dismissed their explanation and allowed the entire class to heckle and tease the Palestinian student. Collectively, the experiences of teachers and students demonstrate the urgent need for educators to consider pedagogies of discomfort and how to support the informed and engaged discussion of Palestine in schools, as repression is widely practised across Australian schooling institutions.

Penalisation and discipline

Various studies have detailed how teacher-targeted bullying and harassment is a significant problem in Australian schools (Burns, Fogelgam & Billett, 2020; Fogelgam, Burns & Billet, 2019; Riley, Duncan & Edwards, 2011). Within the context of this report, school authorities and leaders targeted teachers who spoke about or showed solidarity with Palestine. In some cases, harsh penalisations and disciplinary measures were imposed in attempts to shut down teachers regarding their position on Palestine. One teacher recalled how their school principal told them in a staff meeting that they were not permitted to discuss the genocide of the Palestinian people. When the participant responded that as a union representative, they shared the teachers' union commitment of teaching for peace, the principal interrupted, yelling, 'This is not a union issue!' Another teacher explained the distressing and intimidating experience of the principal sending them a written directive to remove a Palestine sticker and watermelon badge from their clothing.

A secondary school teacher had reported being sent home from the school immediately, without explanation, when they were found to be distributing flyers about a week of action for Palestine in the school staff room:

I handed out flyers to staff regarding [a] week of action showing solidarity with the people of Palestine. My principal got hold of the flyers and sent me home on the spot. Didn't tell me what I did wrong. Didn't allow me union representation ... The flyers were QR codes linking to journal articles as well as UN articles highlighting the genocide happening in Palestine ... Other staff have been very scared since the principal sent me home. They have been reluctant to show solidarity despite wanting to. My Palestinian colleague was very upset after learning that I had been sent home for handing out flyers.

Another educator, after refusing to remove their keffiyeh, was threatened by their principal, who referenced the prospect of disciplinary action and that an investigation was underway:

He said if I refused to remove the keffiyeh I would be 'refusing a reasonable request made by a principal and could face disciplinary action'. 'Employee Conduct are investigating the matter and will advise on the next steps in terms of consequences.' When I asked what these consequences could be the principal confirmed this could involve sanctions including not being allowed to come in to work. I was told by the AEU that a letter could be sent to me outlining allegations of which aspects of the Public Service Code of Conduct I had breached, then I'd have five days to respond before any sanctions could be introduced.

Similarly, another educator was asked not to wear their keffiyeh on International Women's Day, and was told to focus only on 'women's issues relating to NSW'. Further, they were sent an email attacking them for wearing their keffiyeh and sent a disciplinary message prohibiting staff from mentioning Palestine. A secondary educator who worked at an Islamic school arrived at their pupil free day wearing a Palestine hat and pin, and was immediately targeted by another staff member. The level of policing had shown that while staff could express support for other social justice causes, Palestine remained an exception among progressive causes (see Hill & Plitnick, 2021). As one educator explained:

I had created and printed posters to show solidarity with Palestinian people. The poster had a heart shaped watermelon with the words, 'This Classroom is a safe space for everyone' in large writing, and then in smaller writing the words 'Free, Free Palestine'. This was stuck to my window and door next to similar posters showing support for LGBTQ & First Nations folk. I also had 2 watermelon slices on the window. I was absent from work due to sickness and received an email from my deputy principal instructing me that he had removed the posters as another staff member had reported them and they did not comply with the Departments Code of Ethics. The posters were up for less than 2 days.

These extreme measures and threats of punitive discipline demonstrates the force of anti-Palestinian sentiment in schools, and the ways this contributes to a toxic culture of anti-Palestinian racism, most harshly felt by Palestinian students, families and staff members.

Casual teachers reported that their stance on Palestine determined whether they were offered employment. As one respondent explained, they were cautioned by their principal for wearing a Palestine badge, and their casual workdays were cut.

Casual teachers reported that their stance on Palestine determined whether they were offered employment. As one respondent explained, they were cautioned by their principal for wearing a Palestine badge, and their casual workdays were cut. Another contact outlined that because they were casual staff, they were unable to attend staff meetings, whereby the principal instructed that no discussion of Palestine should occur. When this educator encouraged students to study Palestinian protest songs as part of their English curriculum unit on protest, they witnessed other students racially vilify the only Palestinian student in their class, who was also targeted by other educators. The teacher's contract was not renewed when they spoke up. Another secondary teacher similarly reported,

I wore my keffiyeh on Nakba Day (15 May 2024) and it seemed to be my last casual day at [name redacted] High School. I haven't been called back in for work ever since. I get an average of three days per week.

When I messaged about work possibilities, I was told they would be in touch if need be.

One primary school teacher reported that they were subject to racist bullying in front of other staff for wearing a keffiyeh. On 11 October at 9:05 am, the teacher reported that the following occurred:

I was screamed at by my principal for wearing my keffiyeh. I was called a terrorist. I was called 'antisemitic'. I was told that I was making children feel unsafe. I was told I wasn't being inclusive. I was told that I was breaking the department code of conduct. All of these accusations were screamed at me. Right in my face. She demanded that I take off my keffiyeh or leave.

This educator explained how this instance made them a target. The principal would limit their movements around buildings and look for possibilities to vilify them:

No action was taken because I had called the union who informed me that I had done nothing wrong. However, the principal made it very clear that she did not enjoy my presence and kept finding ridiculous things to complain about me. Also, the parent who had brought the wearing of the keffiyeh to the principal's attention was adamant I should be fired. It went through [the] Dept of Education legal team ... I was asked by the parent through the principal to apologise to the whole school community, which I refused to do. The principal then told me that I was 'not allowed' to go anywhere [with] this parent's two children and they totally rearranged homegroups and literacy classes. I was told that I could not go up or down certain stairs in the school to make sure I never came in contact with the students. I was made to feel constantly that I was at fault.

Students (or their parents) reported similar instances of facing extreme disciplinary measures because they discussed Palestine or expressed solidarity with the people experiencing the genocide across the Gaza Strip. They had official reports written against their names, and were often called to the principal's office to be told that schools are 'neutral' places. In some cases, parents were contacted and told that their children are 'not to bring politics into the school environment'.

In a school play at a public school, a monologue written by a Palestinian student about an Israeli soldier was referred to the Australian Jewish Association (AJA), and was branded as 'antisemitic'. The report was made retrospectively after 7 October, even though the play had been written and performed in August/September of 2023 and there had been no concern raised at the time. It is important to highlight that the penalisations and

discipline measures, as reported by the participants of this survey, were not only about school authorities misusing department policies to target staff and students, but also in the form of public humiliation whereby staff and students were publicly ridiculed by school authorities.

Vilification and normalisation of racism

Racial and religious vilification is defined by the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (n.d.) as behaviour that ‘incites hatred, serious contempt, revulsion or severe ridicule for a person or group of people, because of their race or religion’. It includes behaviours that might encourage others to hate or ridicule a person or group of people, repeated or serious verbal or physical abuse, and encouraging violence towards people who belong to a particular group or religion (Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission n.d.). Abu-Laban and Bakan (2022) point out that ‘as an Arab grouping comprised of both Christians and Muslims, Palestinians are subjected to what Edward Said called Orientalism, a worldview and style of scholarship, depicting the Middle East as inferior in comparison to the West’ (p.508). This kind of prejudice is common in the colonial relationship where inferiority is frequently ascribed to the indigenous people, while superiority is claimed by the colonisers. Bazian (2015) similarly identifies how Islamophobia reinforces racist stereotypes of Palestinians as ‘savages’ (p.1058). The severe vilification of Palestinians and normalisation of anti-Palestine racism is communicated through crude and vile stereotypes, as Barhoum (2014) explains:

Palestinians are often described as ‘terrorists’ – the Palestinian equivalent of ‘thug’, bearing its own set of racist stereotypes ... Palestinians are muted out of the media, and the behemoth pro-Israel PR campaign guarantees that this status quo is preserved ... the entire Palestinian population was reduced to Hamas, as if no Palestinian exists beyond this political entity. (p.17)

The experiences of repression (including silencing, censoring and erasure) are also symptomatic of the structural normalisation of anti-Palestinian racism within Australian educational institutions. Across schools, a culture of repression can lead to the intensification of racism and vilification (Berlet, 2003). Some teachers explained that they would observe or experience anti-Palestinian racism from students and fellow teachers. A Palestinian educator reported that they were told that ‘as per the Department policy’, they were not allowed to wear their keffiyeh or a T-shirt displaying the map of Palestine. The educator recalled, ‘I was told I would not be a good role model for the students if I continued to wear it. I am Palestinian and this map represents my identity.’ A non-Palestinian educator reported that students called them a ‘terrorist’ and ‘baby raper’ for wearing a keffiyeh.

Racial vilification also included the perpetuation of the trope of Palestinian/Arab/Muslim people as terrorists, and the claim that Palestinians ‘deserve’ to be ethnically cleansed. For example, in a public high school in NSW, a student who was collecting donations for the [redacted text] Program, also wanted to collect donations for Gazans arriving in Sydney. A teacher vehemently dismissed their efforts and told this student that Gazans ‘deserved what they got’. Students in another NSW public primary school were shown videos depicting Palestinian people as terrorists. In other instances, educators witnessed how other teachers would vilify students over Palestine. A school staff member explained that a teacher reported a student for wearing a keffiyeh on ‘Sentral [an online school management system] then linked to the ‘radicalisation in schools’ DoE [Department of Education] bulletin’. This staff member explained that this teacher was ‘quick to label brown students as terrorists’.

In a public high school in NSW, a student who was collecting donations for the [redacted text] Program, also wanted to also collect donations for Gazans arriving in Sydney. A teacher vehemently dismissed their efforts and told this student that Gazans ‘deserved what they got’. Students in another NSW public primary school were shown videos depicting Palestinian people as terrorists.

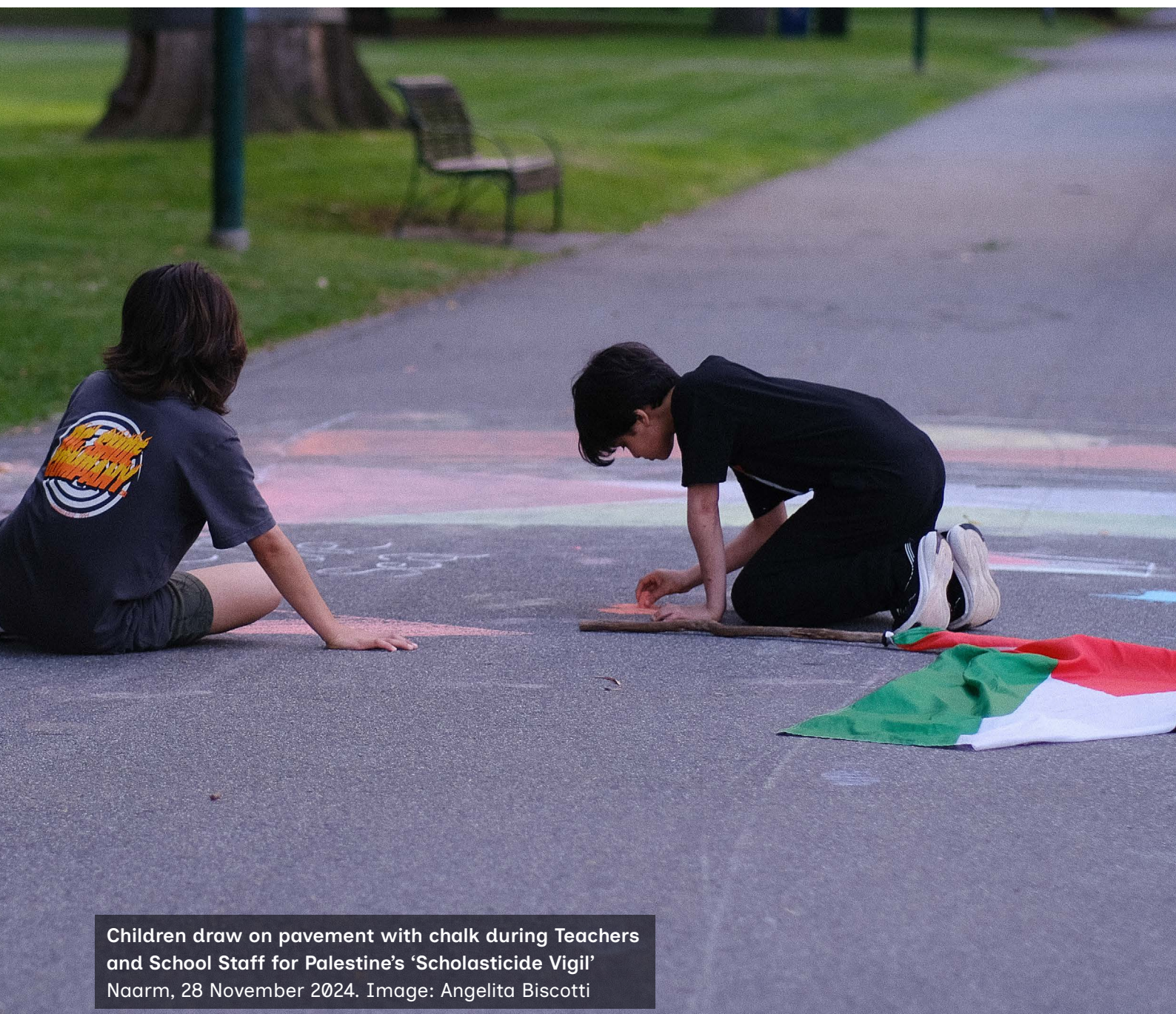
In late October 2023, a non-teaching staff member at a private school witnessed a teacher ask their class to pray for the Israeli victims of 7 October. When a Palestinian child cried because his cousins were recently murdered in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza, the teacher ejected the child from class. Another person who contacted the Register explained that they witnessed a teacher harass a year 8 student for wearing a keffiyeh, telephoning the student’s mother to ‘clarify if she’s wearing it as a political statement or not’. One teacher recalled how a student was speaking with her friends about the traumatic social media images of Palestinians killed in Gaza, when a substitute teacher screamed that all Palestinians are ‘terrorists’. In some cases, teachers witnessed other teachers targeting Palestinian students for having a keffiyeh with them in school:

[I witnessed a] teacher aggressively and publicly confronting students about having the keffiyeh tied on their bag. There is a uniform policy however no sympathy, privacy or understanding was shown, many students from the school have Palestinian backgrounds and also family still there. Overall push from principal down to not allow any discussion about what is happening.

Other families reported how students experienced racial violence from other students that was ignored by educators in schools. A Palestinian parent of a Year 2 child reported an incident where a Jewish student with an Israeli flag in a public school in Victoria walked up to their child, telling them that they ‘can’t wait to help the IDF go kill Palestinians in Gaza’. In another report from a school in Victoria, a Palestinian student was physically

attacked by a Jewish student because they spoke Arabic. In this case, the assailant claimed the Palestinian student was speaking Arabic to ‘piss them off’. In another incident, a parent of a pre-school child in Victoria reported that an Israeli mother had scolded their three-year-old child for wearing a keffiyeh and watermelon bracelet. In a similar incident also in Victoria, a parent reported that a child witnessed two students at a high school openly praising the Israeli army’s genocidal efforts while staff took no action against them.

These accounts show that incitement of hatred towards Palestinians is prevalent in Australian schools. As outlined in the testimonies obtained in the Register, the perpetuation of harmful, dehumanising stereotypes and anti-Palestinian racism continues unaddressed across educational institutions.



Children draw on pavement with chalk during Teachers and School Staff for Palestine’s ‘Scholasticide Vigil’ Naarm, 28 November 2024. Image: Angelita Biscotti

Breaches of policy

In striving to deliver a ‘world class curriculum’, the Mparntwe Education Declaration (n.d.) states that the Australian curriculum ‘supports students to become responsible local and global members of the community in an interconnected world and to engage with complex ethical issues and concepts’ (p.15). Goal 2 of the Mparntwe Education Declaration (n.d.) identifies that Australian students should ‘understand their responsibilities as global citizens and to know how to effect positive change’ (p.6). Further, the Mparntwe Education Declaration outlines how the Australian curriculum strives for Australian students to become ‘informed and responsible global and local members of the community who value and celebrate cultural and linguistic differences, and engage in the global community’ (p.8). Young students in Australian schools are increasingly seen as requiring globally-oriented education (Reynolds, Macqueen & Feguson-Partrick, 2020). In discussing the possibilities for curriculum resources that enable global citizenship education; Philips, de Rivera and Harris (2023) argue that within the Australian curriculum, there are ‘General Capabilities that relate to the global mindedness of global citizenship education, such as “intercultural understanding” and “ethical understanding”. These two domains of understanding enjoin teachers to involve students in activities that foster strong, socially oriented, and ethical outlooks and obligations as global citizens on issues as varied as human rights, the environment, sustainability, and immigration, all of which are core business of global citizenship’ (p.1506). While the Mparntwe Education Declaration (n.d.) encourages students to be global citizens and take an interest in world issues, Palestine is treated as an exception (see Hill & Plitnick, 2021). The censoring, silencing and erasure of Palestine in Australian educational institutions demonstrates how there is a racist double standard that exemplifies anti-Palestinian racism in schools (Al-Natour, 2024). The following incident witnessed by a primary school staff member demonstrates how Palestine is treated as an exception by educators:

A grade three student walked past me and said she supported Palestine because she saw my bag had a Palestinian flag on it. The teacher in an aggressive tone instructed her ‘to sit down and we are not here to talk about world issues’. The little girl was distressed obviously about what is happening in Palestine but it was clear that we aren’t allowed to speak about it. So she just sat down. I was too scared to approach the student after because I didn’t want to make it worse for her.

Many teachers reported trying to honour the Mparntwe Education Declaration (n.d.) by encouraging their students to think globally and engage in global citizenship, but when incorporating the topic of Palestine into these lessons, these teachers experienced a backlash from school authorities. For example, when a teacher encouraged students to do their own research

on a unit about ‘Protest’, they were targeted by other staff members. This teacher reported:

I mentioned in class that there were protests happening in the US and encouraged students to research and use the information if they found it helpful. We were in the middle of a VCE English unit on ‘protest’, thus my statement was in that context of helping students understand the nature of protest and the repression seen.

Another educator at a school in Brisbane led art workshops with students (including one Palestinian student). As part of their class activity, the students expressed interest in making posters about Palestine, which were posted on school noticeboards by the students during their lunch breaks. Within hours, many were missing, destroyed and ripped down, prompting the teacher to discuss the topics of racism, whiteness and white fragility with their students (see Fforde et al., 2022). The educator explained that ‘staff noticed what was happening, and many damaged posters were returned to my desk and we redesigned them as a sign of defiance’, demonstrating the capacity to stay strong in the face of acts of discrimination, and to instil in the students a sense of solidarity and persistence towards justice and global responsibility.

Educators in NSW described how school authorities frequently used the NSW Department’s ‘Controversial Issues in School’ policy (NSW Government, 2025a) to silence discussion about Palestine.

In 2024, it was reported that a Sydney teacher named Wasim El-Haj was called into the principal’s office and asked to not wear his keffiyeh during school-theme-days aimed at celebrating multiculturalism (McKinnon, 2025). In previous years, El-Haj was often asked if he could wear his keffiyeh on school multicultural days, yet in 2024, El-Haj reported how the school emailed him the NSW Department’s ‘Controversial Issues in School’ policy (NSW Government, 2025a) as part of the directive that demanded that he remove his keffiyeh. In this email, El-Haj was told ‘Consistent with the Department’s Controversial Issues and Code of Conduct policies, the staff member in question should be given clear advice, from you, that this item of clothing should not be worn at school, nor in the performance of any duties in connection with his employment. That advice should be complied with immediately’ (McKinnon, 2025). It is clear that this policy – though written poorly – has been misused to silence teachers and students who dared to speak out about Palestine. Educators in NSW described how school authorities frequently used the NSW Department’s ‘Controversial Issues in School’ policy (NSW Government, 2025a) to silence discussion about Palestine. One educator, a member of the NSW Teachers & School Staff for Palestine social media group, was told that photos of staff (even outside of school hours) could not appear on the social media page of this group. Further, their principal sent an email to staff featuring the following extract:

as we discussed this afternoon, I need to remind you regarding two important matters: Any activity that may be covered by the Controversial Issues in Schools should not link our school (or any other NSW public school) to the activity. Whether that is in print or photographically. If in doubt regarding this, the best course of action is always to come and speak with me. Work time should not be used to engage in activities that may be covered by the Controversial Issues policy. As we discussed this afternoon, if there is any ongoing concerns regarding our meeting, the contents of this email, or any other matter, please feel free to drop down to my office and we can discuss further.

Evidently, this policy is cited by school authorities in their attempts to silence anything related to Palestine in schools. Current policies are inadequate for supporting principals and staff to engage in critical education that can enable students to develop an understanding of global histories of imperialism, the interconnections of domination, violence and genocide, and the ongoing legacies of such histories. Another educator recounted how they witnessed staff targeting a student by citing the Controversial Issues in Schools policy (NSW Government, 2025a). In this exchange, the educator was told she had to remain ‘neutral’ on political issues. In terms of defining a ‘controversial issue’, this policy defines it as such:

A controversial issue is an issue on which people hold strong differing views. What is considered controversial by people or communities often differs and changes over time, and can be impacted by attitudes, values and local and world events (NSW Government, 2025a).

This policy does encourage teachers to explore what it deems ‘controversial issues’ with students from multiple perspectives. There is nothing within the NSW Department’s Controversial Issues in School policy (NSW Government, 2025a) document that enables teachers to silence or censor discussion about Palestine in classrooms, or racially vilify Palestinians, or enable school authorities to omit Palestinian cultural items from schools. In contrast, the policy outlines that:

Communication in and related to schools, including the discussion of controversial issues should:

- respect the rights of students, parents and carers, school staff, external providers and visitors to hold different views
- be respectful, free from harassment, discrimination and vilification, and comply with the department’s Code of ethics and conduct, Anti-racism policy, Behaviour code for students and Values in NSW public schools
- facilitate rational discourse and objective study and present views and evidence impartially’ (NSW Government, 2025a)

If indeed the NSW Department of Education was to define anything related to Palestine or Palestinians as a ‘controversial issue’, simply because different people within schooling communities hold different views regarding Palestine, the first component clearly outlines that the Department still has an obligation to respect the rights of students, staff and the schooling community to hold their views. The second component is also relevant to this report, as the Register has highlighted how staff and students have been racially vilified for simply discussing Palestine in schools. So, while school authorities have used this policy to repress students and staff, they have also breached this policy and the NSW Department of Education anti-racism policy. The third component regarding impartiality is also poorly worded, and as outlined in the section on ‘Neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ as pedagogies of repression in this report, impartiality is not achievable in any sense.

Racism limiting critical pedagogies

The heightened levels of anti-Palestinian racism in schools exhibit the limitations of current inclusive pedagogies, as staff and students were consistently prevented from engaging with Palestine in schools, even on multicultural days and celebrations. Teacher knowledge and ignorance about Palestine also demonstrated how racism can limit pedagogies in ways that misrepresent, stereotype or silence Palestinian perspectives in classrooms.

School multicultural days involve Palestine erasure and vilification

School multicultural days (such as Harmony Day) ‘are seen as a means for celebrating cultural diversity and giving recognition to the ethnic heritage of students and their families’ (Watkins & Noble, 2019, p.295). Specifically, Harmony Day is celebrated on 26 March annually, the same day as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The Howard Government (1996–2007) created ‘Harmony Day’ to cynically replace the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, based on the view that Australian society did not need to combat racism as it was already ‘unified’ (Butler, 2023). Further, school celebrations such as Harmony Day (and similar) have been critiqued as tokenistic displays of ‘lazy multiculturalism’, which ‘are seen as a means for celebrating cultural diversity and giving recognition to the ethnic heritage of students and their families. While schools may promote them as a vehicle for cultural inclusion and strengthening community, they have long been critiqued for their avoidance of a more critical engagement with deeper issues around cultural complexity, encouraging superficial understandings of culture as

coherent resulting in often essentialised representations of these cultures' (Watkins & Noble, 2019, p.295).

In spite of the legitimate criticisms of Harmony Day, we have witnessed how schooling environments have simultaneously purported to be multicultural spaces that celebrate the ethnic heritage of students, while engaged in racism against Palestinian students and staff celebrating their heritage. At Condell Park High School in NSW, a student was banned from attending their year 12 formal celebration because they wore a keffiyeh at their graduation ceremony (*Middle East Monitor*, 2024). During Refugee Week in Victorian schools, students were allowed to read stories by refugees from Iran and Sudan, but were prohibited from discussing or mentioning Palestine (Coghlan, 2024).

In submissions to the Register, respondents discussed how school celebrations of these days were opportunities to vilify Palestinians. For example, one educator explained how they worked in a school that did not allow a student to bring in a Palestinian flag during their Harmony Day celebrations. In one particularly stark example of this kind of exceptionalism faced by Palestinians and supporters, students carrying or wearing the Palestinian flag during a multicultural day in March 2024, at a state high school in NSW, were told by the principal and deputy principal to remove them. The flags were then confiscated. Students noticed how the Palestine flag was singled out and all other flags were permitted. A respondent explained that on Harmony Day, 7 March 2024, students in a public high school in NSW that wore scarves with the Palestinian flag were singled out by a deputy principal, and were asked to be removed on the grounds that 'no flags were allowed'. Another respondent explained that at their school, Palestinian students were prevented from wearing traditional Palestinian clothing during the school's Harmony Day celebrations. Similarly, a NSW public school student reported that their teachers intimidated her because she wore her keffiyeh. In another report, an educator stated that they put up a Palestinian flag for a cultural diversity display and their principal asked them to take it down, whilst this principal placed an Israeli flag on this display. At a school with a large Arab student population, students decided that their end-of-year cultural dance song would be 'Dammi Falastini' by Palestinian singer, Mohamad Assaf. The school principal intervened, forbidding the group to dance to this song, stating it was 'inappropriate'. The principal 'then kept asking the teacher involved if there was anything else in the dance that was Palestinian related as she claimed she didn't want to upset anyone'.

Teachers' limited knowledge and engagement with Palestine

In her book *Palestine in Israeli textbooks: Ideology and propaganda in education*, Jewish-Israeli scholar Nurit Peled-Elhana (2013) argues that the Israeli curriculum intentionally marginalises Palestinian perspectives on history, denies Palestinian experiences of the Nakba, and stereotypes Palestinians as irrational, primitive, terrorists – and similar depictions that aim to justify Israel's dominance over their lives. The Israeli colonial project has engaged in deliberate attempts to suppress and erase Palestinian narratives in education (Naser-Najjab, 2020). Specifically, Nakba denial operates as 'a key site of memory denial which occurs both by the state of Israel and internationally through its allies. The long-standing pro-Israel narrative surrounding 1948 has rested on an edifice of myths especially popular in the West. These myths, or forms of Nakba denial, include that the land was empty, that Palestinians did not exist, and that opposition to Israel is fascist and racist' (Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2022, p.511). These misrepresentations of Palestinians and history (including Nakba denial) often involve stereotypes (Suleiman, 1974) that are manifestations of anti-Palestinian racism among educators. Saleh and Awwad (2024, p.14) explain that 'Palestinians of all faiths are often erased by mythologies that misrepresent oppression as an ancient religious "conflict" rather than relatively recent settler-colonialism. These mythologies often erase our narratives and very existence as Palestinians'. These techniques of memory denial and historical silencing are central parts of settler colonial governance. This also occurred in Australia, as demonstrated by prominent settler historian Henry Reynolds' book *Why weren't we told?* (2000), whereby Reynolds questions the intentional denial of First Nations' perspectives in Australian history.

Participants reported that pro-Israeli bias is common among educators. In this bias, educators often positioned 'Jewish' in opposition to 'Palestinian', as though support can be shown to one group or the other (when, in reality, there are anti-Zionist Jews who support Palestine). A teacher explained that their Principal told them:

we had to remain neutral at school as there were Jewish kids who could be offended ... I said the majority of kids here are Muslim and are pro-Palestine so I don't think we need to worry about offending anyone. She said, well, I'm pro-Israel so you just don't know who you might offend. I was shocked.

In a report from Victoria, a teacher claimed that 'Israel and Muslims have been at war for thousands of years', suggesting the genocide in Gaza was an inevitability 'due to longstanding disagreements'. Educators treated 'Jewish' as though it was categorically the same as 'Israeli', and therefore Palestine activities and initiatives were positioned in an inaccurate

and flawed ‘Jew vs Muslim’ binary that involved the erasure of Palestinian Christians (and the erasure of the diversity of Palestinian society, see Khalidi, 2020). For example, a student required to write a protest piece for a senior assessment task wanted to write on ending the war in Gaza but was told ‘that topic is controversial’ and they should ‘be mindful that one of the teachers on the assessment panel is Jewish’.

In another example, a teacher recounted how a student had been disturbed by the distortion of history being shared at an excursion to the Sydney Jewish Museum:

A student came to speak to me at the start of the History lesson as he was concerned by the messages being passed along in the Sydney Jewish Museum excursion. He told me the tour guide was saying the Palestinians are doing to the Israelis what happened to the Jews during WWII. As a Palestinian himself he was greatly concerned by this falsehood, particularly that it was not grounded in evidence and his classmates may not understand that this was not true.

Further, staff reported interactions with other staff that involved severe misrepresentations of Palestinian history. A teacher who left the profession due to anti-Palestinian racism reported that a Christian school had invited Palestinian Christians to tell their story about Israel’s colonisation of their lands. The minister at the school equated the modern-day Palestinians with the Philistines in the bible. A witness explained:

I felt angry that the pastor had attempted to equate modern Palestinians with the David and Goliath story, when the situation of the colonised Christian Palestinians was more of the David kind.

There were numerous reports of misrepresentations of history occurring in classrooms, pointing to the limited knowledge of Palestine among teachers, wilful ignorance, misunderstanding and, in some cases, possibly intentional misrepresentation. For example, in a HASS class in a private school in WA, the teacher remarked ‘Jews have a God-given right to the land’ and disparaged the pro-Palestine protests. In a school in the ACT, a student was asked not to write about the war on Palestine, and told to choose a ‘normal’ war. When the student changed the title to genocide, the teacher asked them not to write about Palestine at all. There were also reports of teachers shutting down student conversations with simplistic or dismissive comments, contributing to a silencing of the topic of Palestine in the curricula. Further, these actions of teachers shutting down conversations about Palestine had exemplified the inadequate capacity of teachers, based on their lack of knowledge of Palestine.

For example, in a HASS class in a private school in WA, the teacher remarked ‘Jews have a God-given right to the land’ and disparaged the pro-Palestine protests

For instance, in a public school in NSW, a teacher silenced students talking about Palestine stating, 'Israelis want peace and are just defending themselves!'. In a class in a Victorian public school, the teacher exclaimed that they did not care 'about Palestine' after hearing the student's reply to the class discussion of what was meaningful to them. In another instance at a school in Queensland, a violin teacher who was aware that a student was Muslim, asked the student to rehearse and perform the Israeli national anthem for their exam after 7th October 2023. When the student refused to perform it, the educator failed them.

Several parents contacted the Register on behalf of their children to report how teachers misrepresented and dismissed the current genocide in the Gaza Strip. For example, one student's HASS (Humanities and Social Sciences) teacher in an independent public high school in Western Australia when commenting on the events in Palestine stated, 'It all started at a music festival,' thus erasing the long history of colonial occupation of Palestine by Israel. On 14 March 2024, a PE teacher in a NSW girls school had used class time to express their opinions on Muslim 'invasions' across history. These issues had nothing to do with the curriculum and did not enable students to properly explore the issues in a pedagogically appropriate way. Parents across Victoria reported that school leaders misrepresented the Gaza Genocide as 'Israeli self-defence'. Despite being challenged by their students, a teacher in Victoria explained that what was happening in Israel was a 'good thing' and rejected the narrations of the events in Gaza as a genocide. A participant from Victoria cited that the curriculum for a Global Perspectives class was focused on depicting Arabs and Muslims as terrorists, thus teaching damaging racial stereotypes. This exemplifies how often Eurocentric curriculum can reinforce racism and this, coupled with a lack of racial literacy, creates harmful classroom environments for non-European students (see Brown, 2019; Brown et al., 2021). Again, the reporting to the Australian Jewish Association (AJA) for alleged 'antisemitism' of the student, who wrote a monologue in a play performed prior to 7 October (discussed previously) is an example of how anti-Zionism is frequently mischaracterised as antisemitism. Australian researchers have argued that 'the conflation of Zionism with Judaism and, by extension, of antizionism with antisemitism aims to justify political repression in the service of protecting a colonial racial state' (Brooks & Tatour, 2024).

Impacts of racism

Respondents reported the significant impact of these experiences of anti-Palestinian racism. Parents shared how they felt disrespected, vilified and misunderstood for being Palestinian, and noted it was a common experience. Many reported their children being 'upset and hurt', 'scared', 'anxious' and 'sad'. Others pointed to the isolation their children felt. Parents

were also 'disgusted' that teachers could be so lacking in compassion for students who had relatives killed in Gaza. A parent 'scolded by an Israeli mum' decided to pick her child up from pre-school at an earlier time to avoid contact with the other mother. Another parent noted how 'exhausting and dehumanising' it felt to have to constantly advocate for their child when he experienced discrimination at school. A senior student who had their Palestine flag confiscated on Multicultural Day and was yelled at by the deputy principal reported feeling 'intimidated and overwhelmed'. A high school student wrote about the incident they had experienced, stating:

At first I was really angry because I knew nothing was wrong and they were just being racist or feeling attacked by perfectly reasonable material. Eventually it turned into sadness because I felt really alone. Very few people defended me publicly except for my parents and their friends. A couple of my teachers expressed their support privately but didn't feel like they were able to defend me.

One parent reported feeling angry that a history teacher could misrepresent historical events, another was 'furious', and another 'annoyed about the historical lies and framings'. A parent was 'disappointed that the future generation cannot talk about humanity and current world incidents' because of schools silencing and shutting down any kind of conversation about what is happening to Palestinians. Another parent noted that this environment of censorship had made students fearful to discuss the topic, another reported their child was upset 'because she thought she had done something wrong', pointing to the confusion many students experienced in relation to participating in rallies and actions in support of their community, but being shut down and disciplined at school for bringing those hopes and cares into the classroom and the playground. This kind of atmosphere and the many discrete experiences of discrimination contributed to Palestinian parents and children feeling 'marginalised' and 'distraught ... that this could happen in a place we thought was safe'.

Educators outlined how experiences of anti-Palestinian racism had impacted their workplaces, trust with colleagues, and their faith in the department of education of their state/territory. For example, a teacher reflected on being profiled for speaking up about Palestine and explained, 'It was a very scary and isolating experience. I felt very isolated in the workplace.' When educators witnessed school leaders vilify others over their stance on Palestine, they reported how they lost trust in their workplaces. One teacher reported that they 'feel unsafe approaching this staff member for support. She is our first point of contact for all matters and can undermine any attempt at us reaching out to different staff members for support first'. Teachers reported how anti-Palestinian racism had impacted their workplace relationships, with one teacher reporting: 'I was so upset. Still am. Cannot stand those two deputies [deputy principals] now. I do not

want anything to do with them.’ Another reported, ‘I lost all trust in the department and find it hard to trust that the department supports their staff. It is clear there is no protection or protocols to make us feel safe at work. This is a case of bullying and harassment, which is overlooked.’ Another teacher mentioned feeling bullied, leaving not only the job, but Australia: ‘I felt bullied, and I no longer wished to work there. I have since left that job. And I have left Australia in disgust at the government’s line.’

After being profiled for wearing a watermelon badge, a secondary teacher reported how they ‘had a panic attack’ and left a meeting about their badge ‘in tears’. After students stalked and targeted a secondary teacher’s social media posts about Palestine, this teacher reported that it ‘definitely gave me anxiety. I feel worried about going back to work’. Teachers often reported that they would take sick leave because of how traumatic these instances were, while others on casual contracts knew that anti-Palestinian racism was why they lost future employment at some schools. Two casual primary school teachers in NSW reported the impact of racism left one teacher feeling ‘withdrawal, isolation, exclusion, depression. Loss of income for some weeks. I’m still looking for work now’, while another, asked to remove a Palestine-themed lanyard around her neck, reported:

I am still in shock. I had already experienced a workplace incident 3 years ago and only just returned with this agency a few days in the last 2 years. I absolutely didn’t expect someone to treat me like a criminal and tell me to remove a piece of hidden almost nonvisible item and treat me like I had distressed small children and ruined their psychology.

Other educators began to resent working in these schools and how they felt in their workplaces:

Every time I entered the school gates I had a knot in my gut wondering if ‘today was the day’ I’d get the letter telling me I’d been fired or sanctioned. For wearing a scarf. Students who had been disciplined for trying to wear a keffiyeh saw and wrote later that they felt proud to see teachers standing with them. Students in my class felt empowered to explore their own views about the genocide in persuasive speeches, unprompted by me – the scarf silently told them I was a safe person to share their views with. To this day I have been too scared to say the word Palestine in my classrooms, even if students bring it up, I just invite other views or ask them questions.

Evidently, the impacts of anti-Palestinian racism on both staff and students across Australian schools requires considerable and urgent attention.

Conclusion

After closely analysing the testimonies of respondents to the APAN Register, and based on our review of the literature on anti-Palestinian racism in colonial institutions, we identify how anti-Palestinian racism manifests in Australian schools through various forms, including:

- 1.** The repression of silencing and censorship, which includes school staff and authorities racially vilifying staff for speaking up about Palestine, discussing Palestine in the classrooms or students discussing Palestine in school environments; targeting teachers for participating in activities outside of school hours such as rallies for Palestine or stalking their personal social media posts and incriminating them for sharing Palestine content; vilifying staff and students for wearing Palestinian cultural items while showing indifference to students wearing other cultural items.
- 2.** The ways that Eurocentric narratives that demand teachers be ‘unbiased’, ‘apolitical’, ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ serve to repress educators from speaking about Palestine. In examining these experiences, it is clear that anti-Palestinian racism manifests structurally across school authorities and departments of education, whereby pro-Israeli narratives are deemed to be ‘unbiased’, ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ while Palestinian narratives are silenced and censored in schools.
- 3.** The ways that staff and students are accused of making other staff and parents feel ‘discomfort’ or ‘uncomfortable’ for daring to discuss Palestine, while staff openly racially vilify Palestinians as ‘terrorists’ and enable students to discuss pro-Israeli positions while heckling pro-Palestinian staff and students.
- 4.** The unreasonable and unfair disciplinary procedures for staff and students who discuss Palestine, which can range from school authorities verbally and publicly abusing staff and students for discussing Palestine, to staff losing their jobs for publicly expressing support of the Palestinian people.

5. The dehumanisation of Palestinians by staff and students being normalised in schools, which, as Saleh and Awwad (2024) outline, can include ‘racist language, framings, smears, stereotyping and gaslighting’ (p.16). While staff and students who discuss Palestine are significantly penalised and disciplined, respondents in this survey reported staff and students who engaged in interpersonal racism or communicated racist language regarding Palestinians rarely had action taken against them.
6. The failure of policies within schools and education departments designed to foster antiracist environments and critical-thinking skills among students in classrooms being used to vilify and target staff and students who express opinions about Palestine that are not ‘pro-Israeli’.
7. The intentional ‘Progressive-except-Palestine’ approach, whereby educators permit students to discuss social justice and progressive causes in their classroom but censor discussions about Palestine for being ‘too political,’ while demanding that educators and students be ‘apolitical’.
8. The lack of knowledge about Palestine among teachers further inflaming anti-Palestinian racism in schools. At times, students are forced into positions whereby they need to educate teachers about Palestine, to counter ‘colonial mythologies and erasures where the ongoing Nakba, violent settler-colonisation, and sometimes existence of Palestine are denied’ by educators (Saleh & Awwad 2024, p.16). Some participants reported that teachers would insist that the ‘conflict’ began after 7 October 2023, which is an inaccurate account that erases and denies the decades of Israeli settler colonialism and Israel’s ongoing genocide and dispossession of the people of Palestine.

Child holds up sign detailing number of children deprived of their right to education in Gaza due to ongoing Israeli incursion during the 'Children's Press Conference for Palestine' Naarm, 24 November 2024. Image: Angelita Biscotti



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