



**CATHOLIC EDUCATION**  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES FOR RESEARCH IN WESTERN  
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND OFFICES**

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## RATIONALE

This policy addresses the use of Western Australian Catholic Schools and Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) in any research project. It does not apply to agencies of the Catholic Church. Access to Catholic schools and CEWA for the purposes of research occurs through the Executive Director, Catholic Education in Western Australia and must conform to the underlying principles of the Mandate of the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia.

*The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007* (N.S.) underpins all research projects that are reviewed by CEWA. This document, among others, emphasises that institutions have responsibilities for “the quality, safety and ethical acceptability of research that they sponsor or permit to be carried out under their auspices” (pg 4).<sup>1</sup>

The importance of undertaking research is acknowledged in the Bishops’ Mandate where it is noted that it is important to “commission, conduct and cooperate in research projects judged to be of value to Catholic education” (Bishops’ Mandate, paragraph 1.166, page 52).

CEWA also recognises the importance of research which can be used to inform policy making in schools and their community. The value of collaborative networks is also recognised.

A key consideration for any research which is undertaken in Catholic schools is the wellbeing of children and the need to protect them from any potential physical or psychological harm. Any research undertaken in schools must therefore not breach the duty of care obligations of the school to its students as well as the wellbeing of staff and smooth running of the school.

## DEFINITIONS

**Research** refers to any structured and systematic collection of information either from primary sources (students, teachers, principals, parents, others) or secondary sources (data and/or information held by the school or by CEWA). It includes information collected at the school site or through on-line, postal, tape, video or other audio taping collection – see N.S. pg 8 for more detailed definition.

**Mandate** refers to the Mandate, Mandate Letter, Terms of Reference and Membership of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) developed by the Bishops of Western Australia, which reaffirms the importance of Catholic schools for the Church’s mission in Western Australia:

<http://internet.ceo.wa.edu.au/AboutUs/Documents/Bishops%20Mandate%202009-2015.pdf>

**CEWA** refers to Catholic Education Western Australia including the Leederville office and the regional offices of Broome, Bunbury and Geraldton and the 163 schools in the system.

**CEWA Code of Ethical Conduct** refers to Christian ethical conduct which strives to develop and live out relationships in a manner that is based on Gospel values. All are called upon to act in a manner that is: based on Christian ethics, professional, timely and contextually appropriate:

<http://internet.ceo.wa.edu.au/Employment/Documents/062012%20Code%20of%20Ethical%20Conduct.pdf>

**Executive Director** is the Executive Director of Catholic Education in Western Australia.

**HREC** refers to a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) which is accredited by the National Health and Medical Research Council. These committees are constituted under N.S. and governed by the following guidelines

(<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e72>).

HREC approval is necessary before the CEWA research review process can commence.

**N.S.** refers to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). This document sets out the standards for ethical conduct in human research. The N.S. can be located at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e72>

**Researcher's institution** refers to the education or training institution; business (private or otherwise); state or Australian Government Department; incorporated body; not for profit organisation or any legal entity.

**CEWA Research Review Panel** is the group responsible for considering research proposals and recommending acceptance (or otherwise) to the Executive Director

## SCOPE

This policy applies to all Catholic schools across the four dioceses in Western Australia.

This policy does not apply to the wider Catholic Church and its various agencies and parishes. Separate representations would need to be made to those agencies.

## PRINCIPLES

The following principles outline expectations regarding research in Catholic schools and provide guidance in terms of how applications will be assessed.

***Research needs to be of sufficient quality and conform with the NS*** - approval from an accredited HREC is therefore essential before approval can be sought from CEWA. If the researcher's institution does not have an accredited HREC, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that approval is obtained from another accredited HREC, prior to applying to CEWA for approval. Any more than minor changes to the research design and methodology that occur after HREC approval need to be redirected to that HREC for review and new approval.

***Research must not transgress any relevant legislative requirements and system policies and procedures*** which apply to schools. Some of the relevant acts and policies are listed below. Research cannot be engaged in any illegal activity or which may encourage an illegal activity or potentially lead students or staff to unreasonably incriminate themselves.

***Research must have clear links to benefits for students and schools*** – this may include the specific school and its students or education and children more generally. Research that cannot establish such links may not be approved. For example, research regarding broader child health that does not have relevant links to the child's life and schooling may be problematic. Researchers will be required to indicate how the research is relevant and important to schools.

**Research must not adversely affect the wellbeing of students** – this includes their physical, psychological, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing either short or long term, or directly or indirectly. In line with this principle, researchers will be required to present, if working with children, a valid Working With Children Check. Researchers will need to be able to demonstrate that they have the qualifications and experience to manage their project particularly in the area of harm minimisation and ability to deal with unforeseen situations both during and after the research. Where research is classified as being more than ‘low risk’ (NS 2.1) applications will need to specifically detail how risk of harm will be managed. (See section Elaboration of Risk for Students and the Approval Process below for further details around “risk”).

**Research must be appropriate and needs-sensitive where culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups are involved** - this includes communication and research processes which are appropriate to both students as well as their parents in terms of providing information to seek consent.

**Research must not be inconsistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church** – broad subjects and individual research items which are deemed not to be in keeping with the teachings of the Catholic Church will not be approved. Researchers are advised to contact CEWA before preparing a research proposal if they have any doubt.

**Research should not be overly burdensome for schools** – schools are approached by a significant number of researchers each year. While every research submission is judged on its merits, an overall consideration for the Catholic system is to assist in protecting schools from overly burdensome applications unless clear educational value is evident. Lower quality, burdensome and costly research applications may be refused under this principle.

**Research requested by commercial organisations** that have as their aim to profit or financially gain solely for that organisation (including marketing purposes) will normally not be approved within Catholic schools.

**The Executive Director (or nominated delegate) has overarching responsibility for approval of research** that involves Catholic schools, staff, parents and/or students. This responsibility is delegated to the CEWA Research Review Panel. No final approval shall be sought from a Principal before CEWA provides written approval. Researchers may only seek an indication of a Principal’s willingness for their school to participate prior to lodging an application with CEWA. No research can commence in a school without approval from the Executive Director.

**The school principal (or equivalent) has final discretion** as to whether to participate in research. They will exercise their discretion in terms of value, risk, cost, burden and any other matters they consider to be relevant. A further consideration for principals as well as the above, is that they can provide a duty of care to students during the research process. Duty of care cannot be delegated to the researcher or another party.

**Research will conform to all relevant disclosure and non-disclosure requirements** including protecting the privacy and confidentiality of personal information collected during research. Instances where confidential information obtained through research may need to be revealed include reporting under the CECWA Policy Statement 2-D3 Child Abuse and CECWA Child Protection Procedures, or where researchers are legally required to disclose information. Such disclosures override confidentiality and privacy considerations.

## **POLICY DETAILS**

### ***Research Exclusions***

In this policy, “research” does not include:

- Day to day classroom activities.
- Undergraduate student assignments (below Honours level) where they are confined to one site (except where the Principal and/or supervising teacher deems that the questions may involve excessive intrusion on participants and/or where research may be in conflict with teachings of the Catholic Church, in which case this policy applies).
- Mandatory data and information provision to government agencies, where such provision has been required by CEWA as part of normal accountability/reporting procedures.
- Surveys or similar conducted by the school for their own purposes in order to gather feedback from their students, teachers or wider community e.g. satisfaction survey of parents. Where the research is commissioned by the school, the principles outlined above should be adhered to. Liaison with CEWA is recommended for commissioned research.

### ***Categories of Research Applicants***

- Employees of the Catholic education system in Western Australia who are studying towards higher qualification and have obtained HREC approval.
- All external persons not employed by the Catholic education system in Western Australia (including university students, external private and government organisations) who have obtained HREC approval.

### ***Relevant Legislation or Authority***

The following Acts will apply to research activities within schools:

*Working With Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004*

*Freedom of Information Act 1992*

*Occupational Health and Safety Act 1984*

*School Education Act 1999*

*Vocational Education and Training Act 1996*

*Volunteers (Protection from Liability) Act 2002*

*Child Care Services Act 2007*

*Privacy Act 1988*

Related CEOWA Policies:

Bishop’s Mandate letter

Code of Ethical Conduct

Intellectual Property Guidelines

Selection of Appropriate Texts in Catholic Schools

Curriculum

Gender Equity

Religious Education

Dispute and Complaint Resolution

Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying

Smoke Free Schools  
Aboriginal Education  
Child Abuse  
Early Childhood Education  
Occupational Safety and Health in Schools  
Management of Confidential Information in Schools  
Dealing with Bullying and Harassment (Students)  
Healthy Food and Drink Choices

### ***Participation***

Participation in human research is outlined in the N.S. (page 8).

### ***Consent***

The principle for research projects is that consent should be voluntary. That is, it should be based on sufficient information and adequate understanding of the proposed research and its implications to enable a person's voluntary consent.

CEWA will normally only approve research which involves Active Consent (opt-in) consent procedures in research methodologies. Passive Consent (opt-out) procedures will not normally be approved except in very low risk projects. (NR 2.3).

### ***Competing Interests***

In the case of the researcher having a dependency relationship or conflict of interest with the participants (e.g. a relationship such as teacher-student, line-manager-staff, employer-employee), CEWA may request additional safeguards (including assistance of a third party) to be implemented.

Potential competing interests need to be brought to the attention of the researcher's HREC as well as in the application to CEWA.

### ***Participation, Data Withdrawal, Privacy and Confidentiality***

Researchers must comply with the National Statement regarding participation and data withdrawal (N.S. 2.2, 2.3 and 3.2).

Researchers must also comply with the National Statement regarding Privacy and Confidentiality (N.S. 1.11, N.S. 2.2.6 and N.S. 3.2.5).

## **ELABORATION OF RISK FOR STUDENTS AND THE APPROVAL PROCESS**

### **Risk assessment**

An assessment of the research in terms of the potential to lead to harm, discomfort or inconvenience to students is an important part of the research approval process. While the NS provides extensive detail on balancing risk against potential benefits of the research, where students are involved a very conservative approach will be taken by CEWA. This includes consideration of the age, cultural background, education capability and the existence of any learning or other background conditions.

Principals of schools are required to provide a non-delegable duty of care to students on behalf of their parents/caregivers. Where this cannot be guaranteed, research will not be approved. This duty of care applies to students undertaking research at the school as well as out of the school (including at their home) if the school has sanctioned the research.

In the case of research which has the potential to cause inconvenience or discomfort only to students, risk will typically be classified as “low to negligible”. Assessments will focus on the nature, duration and extent of discomfort or inconvenience and the student cohort involved. While a considerable amount of research will involve a low or negligible risk, researchers must nevertheless gauge this risk and outline strategies they will implement to minimise this risk. The resources of the school should not be the main source of planning for risk minimisation.

### **Potential higher risk or harm**

In the case of potential harm to students, the interests of the child will be paramount in any assessment of an application. Harm includes physical, psychological, social, economic and legal. As well as potential or isolated personal harm, the possibility of contagion is also a major consideration. Overall assessments will consider the likelihood, severity and consequences of potential harm.

Higher risk research topics include those associated with:

- Drug or alcohol consumption
- Anti-social behaviour
- Trauma
- Self harm and depression
- Eating disorders
- Sensitive personal and emotional issues
- Sexuality
- Criminal activity or incrimination

Research methodologies are also considered in the approval process. Those that involve the following methods are unlikely to be approved without appropriate justification and a demonstration of a high level of expertise from the researcher in terms of their capacity to manage the risk:

- Passive consent from parents
- Deception (where the intended or unintended outcomes of the research are not fully disclosed)
- Medical or any intrusive procedures
- Use of unfamiliar and dangerous equipment, especially outside the school and not supervised
- Where inadequate support provided by the researcher where risk is higher such that the school’s provision of a duty of care is compromised

### **Research outside school setting**

Research is sometimes conducted outside the school setting. For example, some research methodologies involve the school promoting the research to parents and students and the researchers(s) making contact with the parents (or vice versa) to conduct the research on line or in the parent’s home. By supporting the research and promoting it to parents the principal must still accept responsibility for providing a duty of care which cannot be delegated to the researcher or a third party. Where a research topic involves potential harm, it is often very difficult to provide the necessary level of care when not undertaken in the school. In these circumstances, researchers will need to demonstrate substantively how they will support students. Research conducted outside the school setting is subjected to the same level of scrutiny as research conducted in the school and the school has an equivalent duty of care.



## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007; March 2014*

## RELATED DOCUMENTS

*Research conducted on Department of Education and Training sites by external parties (<http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/policies/research-conducted-on-department-of-education-sites-by-external-parties.en?oid=au.edu.wa.det.cms.contenttypes.Policy-id-3967843>)*