

## RESEARCH IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS POLICY

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Ltd (DOSCEL) values high quality and ethical research that aims to improve the outcomes of students, staff and families in Catholic school communities.

Specifically, DOSCEL welcomes research that:

- supports and improves student learning, wellbeing and engagement
- strengthens school leader, teacher and parent capability to support children and young peoples' learning and development
- encourages jurisdictions, government and community partners to reflect on and enhance their capability to better serve and lead schools
- seeks to engage schools as important and respected stakeholders in educational research
- contributes to the knowledge and capacity of the broader community to enhance the outcomes of children and young people, locally and globally.

The purpose of this document is to assist researchers plan their research project and submit an application to conduct research in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sale that meets DOSCEL requirements and expectations.

#### **Distinctiveness of the DOSCEL process**

DOSCEL reviews research applications using a similar process to a Human Research Ethics Committee, in that we are guided by the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023](#). However, as a jurisdiction focused on providing support and leadership to DOSCEL schools, we also consider:

- how the research process may benefit DOSCEL schools, and the value of potential research outcomes to our schools and jurisdiction
- if the demand and interruption to schools may outweigh any potential benefit, or significantly disrupt the core work of schools (i.e. learning and teaching)
- the alignment (or possible misalignment) with the Catholic ethos, and the DOSCEL Strategic Plan, DOSCEL programs and approach to supporting schools
- the potential risks to our schools and jurisdiction in the conduct of the research, reporting of findings, and achievement of DOSCEL's mission and strategic priorities
- how potential risks will be prevented or minimised
- the appropriateness of conducting the research in a school setting.

## 2.0 RATIONALE

This policy provides information for individuals or organisations who are seeking:

- i. **access to Catholic schools for the purpose of undertaking research; or**
- ii. **access to data related to Catholic schools held by Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Ltd.**

It is expected that when researchers conduct research in Catholic schools, they do so on the basis that the findings may assist to improve student outcomes and increase school effectiveness. Research in areas beyond the immediate concerns of schools should be conducted only when it can be demonstrated that the findings may have a potential benefit for the participants themselves.

The data held by DOSCEL is collected from Catholic schools for accountability requirements of governments and for the purpose of providing leadership and support services to schools. Individuals and organisations seeking access to DOSCEL data collections will need to demonstrate that release of the data will have potential benefit for students in Catholic schools.

## 3.0 RESEARCH THAT REQUIRES DOSCEL APPROVAL

Applications to conduct research in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sale are required from:

- 3.1 all non-school based researchers
- 3.2 school-based researchers conducting research as part of a PhD or professional doctorate
- 3.3 all researchers wishing to conduct research that is deemed sensitive (see section 5. Sensitive Topics in *DOSCEL Research in Catholic Schools Procedures* for details).

DOSCEL approval is not an endorsement of the research, but an indication to schools that the project is ethically sound and meets DOSCEL requirements as outlined in this document. Researchers with DOSCEL approval can approach Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sale, but it is the Principal's decision as to whether they agree for their school to participate in the research in any capacity.

## 4.0 RESEARCH THAT DOES NOT REQUIRE DOSCEL APPROVAL

DOSCEL approval is NOT required from:

- 4.1 school staff undertaking research in their own school for the purposes of ongoing learning, reflection and improvement, and with no intention to publish the findings in the public domain
- 4.2 approved DOSCEL Sponsored Study applicants completing research as part of their study e.g. Capstone Projects

- 4.3 student researchers wishing to conduct research as part of undergraduate study or postgraduate study at diploma, honours or masters level if the research:
  - 4.3.1 is appropriate for a student researcher to conduct in school/s (i.e. the topic is not sensitive according to section 8. Sensitive Topics in *DOSCEL Research in Catholic Schools Procedures*, and the methodology is not intrusive)
  - 4.3.2 is 'negligible' or 'low' risk research according to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines, and therefore highly unlikely to raise concerns for participants, or the school community
  - 4.3.3 is supervised by an experienced researcher, and given ethical clearance by the relevant institution
  - 4.3.4 minimises any risk of participants being identified given the small sample sizes associated with student research.

Student researchers who meet all of the criteria in point 4.3 above can seek approval directly from the school principal, however, principals have the right to request the student seeks DOSCEL approval if they wish.

Principals, student researchers and/or supervisors can also seek DOSCEL advice on any of these matters by emailing [director@doscel.catholic.edu.au](mailto:director@doscel.catholic.edu.au).

## **5.0 RESEARCH THAT DOSCEL IS UNLIKELY TO SUPPORT**

DOSCEL may decline or request changes to applications where:

- 5.1 the content of the research proposal may raise issues contrary to the ethos of the Catholic Church (e.g. sexuality, abortion, contraception, euthanasia)
- 5.2 the potential benefits of the research to Catholic education or the broader community are not demonstrated; or the research is for commercial, journalistic or marketing purposes
- 5.3 benefits of the research are outweighed by the demands placed on participants and school resources
- 5.4 required documentation is incomplete or inadequate
- 5.5 the study method is intrusive and/or inappropriate for the school setting, and has the potential to stimulate stress or risk-taking behaviour, or lead participants to incriminate themselves
- 5.6 the researcher lacks the experience or qualifications to conduct research on:
  - a. the private affairs of participants e.g. body image, mental health, family relations, sexuality; or
  - b. negative risk-taking behaviour e.g. under-age drinking, illicit drug-taking, violence, stealing, suicide

- 5.7 the research focuses on behaviour outside the experience and age range of the participants
- 5.8 there is an unacceptable level of risk to participants, schools and/or DOSCEL
- 5.9 additional support is not provided in relation to matters that may negatively impact participants
- 5.10 confidentiality and privacy of participants is not adequately protected
- 5.11 inappropriate inducements are offered to participants or schools
- 5.12 schools and/or participants are not provided with adequate information, and appropriate consent is not sought.

## **6.0 EXPECTED OUTCOME**

- 6.1 All research requiring approval must be approved by the Director of Catholic Education, prior to approaching DOSCEL schools.
- 6.2 All research must be approved in accordance with the *DOSCEL Research in Catholic Schools Procedure* using the *DOSCEL Research Application Template*.

## **7.0 REVIEW**

**Implementation Date:** November 2020

**Updated:** November 2023

**Review Date:** November 2025