

# AASW Accredited School Social Worker Capability Statement

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**AASW**

Australian Association  
of Social Workers

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## Preamble

The Australian Association of Social Workers is the body mandated by members, higher education providers (HEP) and the broader professional community, to set and maintain standards of professional conduct for social workers in Australia.

The social work profession operates at the interface between people and their social, cultural, physical and natural environments while recognising the impact of the psychological, social, organisational, political and economic determinants on health and wellbeing. Social workers are committed to maximising the wellbeing of individuals and society. We consider that individual and societal wellbeing are underpinned by socially inclusive communities that emphasise principles of social justice and respect for human dignity and human rights, including the right to freedom from intimidation and exclusion.

Drawing on theories of social work, social sciences, psychology, humanities and Indigenous knowledge, social workers focus on the interface between the individual and the environment and recognise the impact of social, economic and cultural factors on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Accordingly, social workers maintain a dual focus in both assisting with and improving human wellbeing, and addressing any external issues (known as systemic or structural issues) that may impact on wellbeing, such as inequality, injustice and discrimination.

This capability statement sets out the distinctive skills, knowledge and abilities of social workers who have a specialised work role in schools. School social workers maintain a dual focus: improving human wellbeing; and addressing systemic or structural issues that may impact on the wellbeing of children and young people in schools, such as inequality, injustice and discrimination. School social workers advocate for the rights of students against the discrimination and reduced opportunities they can sometimes experience. They focus in particular on maximising educational outcomes through the development of safe and inclusive schools and communities, the removal of barriers and inequities, and through therapeutic responses to harm and trauma. Their areas of work include, but are not limited to: direct practice, service management, organisational and system change, policy design and implementation, research, education and professional development.

The statement should be read in conjunction with the [AASW Code of Ethics 2020](#) which identifies the values and moral principles that underpin social work practice and outline the required level of attainment for ethical social work conduct and accountability. All AASW members are required to comply with this Code and it informs all AASW documents and policies. The capabilities should also be read in conjunction with the [AASW Practice Standards 2022 \(coming soon\)](#) which describe the minimal requirements for effective, professional and accountable social work practice in all social work contexts. They provide essential guidance to the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS).

## Capability 1: Engagement and consultation

Accredited School Social Workers build effective person-centred relationships to achieve wellbeing outcomes in collaboration with children and young people, families or carers, schools, communities, other professionals and stakeholders.

### Knowledge

Working with schools requires a strong understanding of:

- the influences on students of family and social networks, physical and mental health, and disability
- organisational structures, functions, regulations and lines of authority within schools and the employing body
- government legislation related to the quality of the educational experience and outcomes
- disability standards requiring reasonable adjustments for students with learning difficulty and/or disability
- the principles and processes of professional teamwork in school settings
- the work roles and scope of other professionals working with schools and student support services
- roles, influence and balance in decision-making in schools and systems.

### Skills

Accredited School Social Workers demonstrate the following specialist skills:

- applies principles of assertive engagement to establish confidence as a trusted source of advice and support
- consults with teachers and other school staff as a trusted colleague
- develops and uses formal mechanisms to collect data to inform assessment and approach
- engages relevant agencies and peak bodies where appropriate
- promotes student voice and agency in developing service plans
- provides advice on the development and implementation of learning plans for students with disability
- works collaboratively with other professionals in developing plans for support, engagement and sustainable wellbeing outcomes
- employs highly effective approaches with hard to engage students, families and significant others
- engagement with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- engagement and support strategies for children and families with additional learning needs.

## Capability 2: Assessment

Accredited Accredited School Social Workers apply high-level conceptual and analytical skills in assessing the factors impacting on the student experience and well-being in the school context.

### Knowledge

Working with schools requires a strong understanding of:

- contemporary theories and practices informing assessment of child development, attachment, and the impact of trauma
- child and adolescent developmental ages and stages
- demographic trends and outlooks for student populations
- learning environments and potential barriers to engagement and outcomes
- trauma and its impact on student behaviour and learning
- intersectionality and the complexities and impact of assessment
- risk assessment, management and safety planning for at-risk students
- mental health issues, suicidal ideation, threats, and self-harming
- the range, nature and impact of disabilities and learning difficulties on children and adolescents
- family diversity and influences on behaviour
- legislative requirements for information management and sharing.

### Skills

Accredited School Social Workers demonstrate the following specialist skills:

- undertakes systematic and comprehensive assessments of student needs, challenges and opportunities
- ensures they are up to date and fully informed on matters related to their work roles
- assists in the analysis of disability assessment data to inform reasonable adjustments for disability
- co-ordinates support for students with multiple and complex needs
- identifies trigger points for action to address the needs of students in crisis
- liaises with external organisations concerned with student health and wellbeing
- keeps records in accordance with legislative, school system and individual school policy
- follows protocols for information sharing with other agencies
- focuses case assessment on ways of reducing the need for intervention.

### Capability 3: Intervention and protective practices

Accredited School Social Workers provide appropriate, timely and protective intervention practices to achieve positive and sustainable wellbeing outcomes for individual students, families and significant others.

#### Knowledge

Working with schools requires a strong understanding of:

- the value base and methods of social work intervention
- theory and practice guiding effective preventive and early intervention programs
- school policy, curriculum and approaches to teaching, learning and engagement
- how resilience in children and adolescents can be developed and supported
- current and emerging child protection policy and practice
- related socio-legal issues and ethical decision-making
- external community service systems
- legislation, policies and reporting procedures aimed at protecting children at risk from harm and abuse
- school policies, system supports and referral pathways for children with disability and additional learning needs
- policy and practice supporting confidentiality and consent.

#### Skills

Accredited School Social Workers demonstrate the following specialist skills:

- engages with key stakeholders to ensure their views are appropriately captured
- provides strategies and interventions aimed at building and sustaining resilience in children and young people
- establishes role as a trusting significant other in working with children and adolescents
- addresses complex situations through student and family counselling and casework
- provides advice to school staff when children and young people are at risk of harm or abuse
- provides advice on modifications of education programs, individualised support behaviour management, and classroom dynamics
- identifies and provides coordination of relevant systems of care
- contributes high-level expertise in responding to child protection concerns
- provides debriefing and ongoing support for staff experiencing difficult circumstances
- identifies end points for intervention and provides confirmation of outcomes
- communicates effectively with families about confidentiality, reporting duties and sharing of information.

## Capability 4: Policy and program development

Accredited School Social Workers contribute to the development and implementation of system and school-based strategies aimed at identifying and supporting the social, emotional and educational needs of children and young people in schools.

### Knowledge

Working with schools requires a strong understanding of:

- government frameworks supporting policy change and reform
- theory and practice of policy development and implementation
- legislation informing school policy and practice
- school and community organisational governance, structures and processes
- referral pathways for the provision of support and resources
- crisis response theory and practice
- resources available to support crisis intervention actions
- policy development, program implementation and evaluation.

### Skills

Accredited School Social Workers demonstrate the following specialist skills:

- develops and implements prevention and early intervention programs
- initiates and conducts evaluations of practice and interventions
- engages in policy and program development networks with local service providers
- supports school communities on critical incident assessment and responses
- takes a key role in systems, local and community planning and service delivery
- questions inappropriate or inequitable policy goals and outcomes
- identifies sources for appropriate resources supporting program implementation.

## Capability 5: Reflective practice

Accredited School Social Workers approach practice in schools based on professional knowledge guided by ongoing reflection in action and critical analysis.

### Knowledge

Working with schools requires a strong understanding of:

- the history and impact of economic, social, cultural factors on school systems and student access and outcomes
- the diversity of perspectives and approaches of school staff and other professionals
- schools as socialising institutions, with particular attention to dimensions of power and disadvantage
- the factors creating inequalities for children and young people
- the significance of self-reflection, empowerment and non-oppressive practice in the school context.

### Skills

Accredited School Social Workers demonstrate the following specialist skills:

- reviews and clarifies the scope of their professional role in school settings
- supports school staff using a critically reflective conversation approach
- critically assesses their impact on students, parents and staff
- reviews outcomes of efforts to maximise student learning, engagement and opportunity
- integrates findings from evidence-based best practice, policies and current research
- participates in systematic analysis and research activities focusing on student wellbeing in schools
- reviews and modifies approach to practice in response to developments in school systems strategies and programs.

## Capability 6: Leadership

Accredited School Social Workers lead and supports strategic initiatives that build the capability and capacity of school workforces to support student learning, engagement and wellbeing.

### Knowledge

Working with schools requires a strong understanding of:

- evidence-based practice and its use in guiding change and reform in education policy and practice
- the unique contribution of social work in schools and how it intersects with other perspectives and professions
- theoretical frameworks and principles for leading change
- mental health intervention frameworks across all tiers, including early intervention and primary prevention
- effective approaches to developing partnership models of service delivery.

### Skills

Accredited School Social Workers demonstrate the following specialist skills:

- engages in research informing strategic reform and initiatives to improve student wellbeing
- contributes to the improvement of service provision through research, policy development and advocacy
- engages in networks, coalitions and collaborations providing policy advice to governments and school systems
- manages relationships with and between program or project stakeholders
- contributes to improvement of social work practice in school settings
- takes an active role in the development and improvement of whole of school policy and practice
- collaborates in design and delivery of professional development opportunities for the school workforce
- advocates on behalf of students to their parents and carers, schools and outside organisations
- conducts training and information sessions aimed at mitigating the impact of potential critical incidents
- coordinates and supervises social work students in school placements in school and educational contexts
- takes a lead role in the initiation, development and delivery of self-care information to staff.

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