

St Thomas the Apostle School

Anti-bullying policy (including Cyberbullying)



Introduction

At St Thomas the Apostle School, the dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic social teaching and is intrinsic to our education ministry. Consequently, the principle that the person is made in the image and likeness of God is central to the mission of our parish school.

This policy identifies the interconnectedness of the characteristics of quality Catholic learning and teaching. It is intended to value, respect and promote the self-esteem and dignity of each student, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. The school will actively promote anti-bullying messages, alerting students and staff of the need to be vigilant.

It is essential that we create and maintain a respectful, safe and supportive learning environment that promotes student wellbeing, personal growth and positive self-esteem amongst our diverse range of learners ([eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities](#)).

The prevention of and responses to incidents of bullying, inappropriate use of technology and disrespectful behaviour are more readily achieved in a caring and supportive school culture that promotes positive relationships and reflects Gospel values. Bullying, cyber-bullying, harassment, aggression and violence disregard core values of our faith, including dignity, respect, justice, equity, compassion, trust and courage. Importantly, such actions can adversely affect the wellbeing of our students and are therefore unacceptable.

Purpose

This policy:

- encourages a culture that is firm about unacceptable behaviour
- articulates how bullying is defined and addressed; including the means taken to prevent incidents and the response taken when an incident occurs
- supports the school's Mission and Vision Statement and guidelines of Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS)
- actively promotes anti-bullying messages, alerting students and staff of the need to be vigilant.

Principles

This policy is grounded in the beliefs that:

- every person has the right to be treated respectfully and feel safe from any form of verbal, physical and emotional abuse, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures (such as Aboriginal culture)
- the school is committed to building and nurturing a community that values diversity
- parents are the prime educators of their children
- the school community is involved in the development of school policies
- identification and reporting of unacceptable behaviour is essential to the effective implementation of this policy
- complainant(s) will be protected from victimisation

- learning technologies are used ethically and responsibly in the school environment, and in a way that minimises the opportunity for children, young people and students to be harmed
- communication is respectful and human dignity is valued
- regular monitoring of school policies is necessary, and improvements are made where appropriate.

Definitions

Bullying: is repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person that creates a risk to health and safety. It occurs when an individual or a group deliberately upsets or hurts another person, their property, reputation or social acceptance on more than one occasion. Forms of bullying include:

Physical bullying: pushing, shoving, fighting, pinching and any other unwelcome physical contact used intentionally to intimidate or hurt someone.

Verbal bullying: put downs, particularly those referring to physical characteristics, can result in loss of self-esteem. Racial discrimination of any kind is a form of bullying.

Gesture bullying: non-verbal signals used to silence and intimidate a victim.

Extortion bullying: physically stronger and more powerful students may bully other students into giving up their possessions, buying food and drink, or taking part in rule breaking activities.

Exclusion bullying: deliberately being left out of activities is a most hurtful form of bullying.

Visual bullying: offensive notes or material, graffiti, or damaging other people's possessions.

Sexual bullying: touching, sexually orientated jokes, drawings of, or writing about someone's body, using rude names or commenting about someone's morals, unwanted invitations of a sexual nature, asking questions about someone's private life.

Cyber-bullying: the use of various forms of electronic media to spread text and visual messages to cause hurt, embarrassment, intimidation.

Categories of Bullying: There are three broad categories of bullying:

1. **Direct physical bullying:** This form includes hitting, tripping, and pushing or damaging property.
2. **Direct verbal bullying:** This form includes name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse.
3. **Indirect bullying:** This form of bullying is harder to recognise and often carried out behind the bullied person's back. It is designed to harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation. Indirect bullying includes:
 - lying and spreading rumours
 - playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate
 - mimicking
 - encouraging others to socially exclude someone
 - damaging someone's social reputation and social acceptance
 - cyber-bullying, which involves the use of email, text messages or chat rooms to humiliate and distress someone.

What Bullying is Not

Many distressing behaviours are not examples of bullying, even though they are unpleasant and often require teacher intervention and management. There are three socially unpleasant situations that are often confused with bullying including:

- **Mutual conflict:** In mutual conflict situations, there is an argument or disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the problem. However, unresolved mutual conflict sometimes develops into a bullying situation, with one person becoming targeted repeatedly for 'retaliation' in a one-sided way.
- **Social rejection or dislike:** Unless the social rejection is directed towards someone specifically and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others, it is not bullying.
- **Single-episode acts:** Single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. If a student is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied. Nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different students is not the same as bullying.

Procedures

All members of our school community must be aware of the possibility of bullying and take action to prevent bullying if it is reasonably foreseeable.

Responsibilities: The school

St Thomas the Apostle School will respond to all reported incidents of bullying, perceived or actual, sensitively, fairly and promptly by:

- using an Anti-Bullying Response Pathway when we become aware of incidents. The Pathway assists with a regulated and thorough response.
- implementing an Anti-Bullying Action Plan as part of the Response Pathway.
- keeping a written record of any bullying investigation.
- encouraging students, staff and parent and carers to report bullying and cyber-bullying to the class teacher or directly to the principal
- investigating complaints of bullying and cyber-bullying in a manner that respects the dignity and privacy of those involved.
- ensuring that complaints of bullying and cyber-bullying are handled in a way that is sensitive to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and that recognises the diverse circumstances of students
- nominating a person or staff to co-ordinate strategies for the resolution of specific bullying incidents reported in this school
- notifying parents/guardians/carers of bullying incidents involving their children and allowing them to have input into decisions that affect their children, where this is appropriate
- notifying the relevant Regional Leadership Consultant of any serious incident
- contacting the Police/Police Youth Liaison Officer if the bullying situation has involved violence, threat of harm or alleged criminal conduct
- maintaining records of bullying incidents and related interventions in accordance with relevant recordkeeping requirements (such as the Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards)
- conducting Student Safety Audits at least once a year to promote safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments

- promoting student voice and empowerment in classrooms and through the use of Student Representative Council to discuss matters associated with bullying, cyber bullying, safety and wellbeing
- reviewing and evaluating the school's anti-bullying policy and the responsible use of technology procedures to ensure they are working effectively.
- engaging with parents/guardians/carers to review and evaluate the school's anti-bullying policy and the responsible use of technology procedures to ensure they are working effectively.

Responsibilities: Staff

Staff at St Thomas the Apostle School aim to treat all members of the school community with dignity and respect and build respectful relationships that respond effectively and sensitively to the needs of each student by:

- implementing the student anti-bullying and responsible use of technology procedures by responding promptly and appropriately to reported incidents of bullying, in a way that is sensitive to the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of students
- supporting the student anti-bullying and responsible use of technology procedures through positive modelling and the promotion of appropriate behaviour
- engaging in professional learning to support appropriate anti-bullying responses which could include cyber safety, restorative justice practices, mediation and developing social skills in students. Such opportunities are made available to staff on the same basis as other professional learning.
- supporting all aspects of related school policies
- remaining vigilant in how students are using technology through positive modelling and the promotion of appropriate behaviour
- embedding critical thinking, values clarification, respectful relationships and developing empathy into our teaching practice
- responding to bullying and cyber-bullying concerns by providing age appropriate guidance and boundaries so that students can learn to self-regulate.

Responsibilities: Students

Students at St Thomas the Apostle School have responsibilities to use technology appropriately and respectfully. The staff at St Thomas the Apostle School will encourage and support students to:

- follow the anti-bullying and responsible use of technology procedures
- immediately seek help from a trusted adult if they are aware of or involved in a bullying or cyber-bullying incident
- seek support if bullied and refrain from retaliating in any bullying incident
- understand that any social networking site that identifies the school by name or image or implication is part of the school environment
- in age-appropriate circumstances the student should keep evidence of alleged bullying and produce it on request (for example phone text messages).

Responsibilities: Parents/Guardians/Carers

Parents/guardians/carers at St Thomas the Apostle School have responsibilities to use technology appropriately and respectfully. St Thomas the Apostle School will work in partnership with parents/guardians/carers in responding to incidents of bullying. Staff at St Thomas the Apostle School will:

- remind parents/guardians/carers about the need to reinforce the school messages in the proper use of technology to help children grow into ethical and responsible digital citizens
- encourage parents/guardians/carers to report serious matters of out-of-school hours bullying and cyber-bullying to the Police or other appropriate authority (such as the Internet Service Provider) and, as relevant, to the school
- ask parents/guardians/carers to contact the school immediately through the class teacher or directly through the principal if they know of any bullying incident
- expect that parents/guardians/carers will model behaviour that is indicative of Gospel values and that reflect the school's Vision and Mission statement. Thus parents/guardians/carers are required to act respectfully to all members of the school community at all times.
- encourage parents/guardians/carers to report serious matters of out-of-school hours bullying and cyber-bullying to the Police or other appropriate authority (such as the Internet Service Provider). When such bullying concerns the wellbeing of their own child, parents/guardians/carers are to contact the principal.
- encourage parents/guardians/carers to be involved in decisions regarding incidents of bullying that affect their child, where this is appropriate.

References

- [Privacy Compliance Manual](#) (2020). Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) (CEVN website)
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2021. [Bullying Prevention and Response Policy](#)
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2021. [Cybersafety and Responsible Use of Digital Technologies](#)
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2020. [Mobile Phones - Student Use](#).

Resources

[Bully Stoppers](#) – a resource containing information and advice for the school community, including students, parents and school staff.

[Bullying. No Way!](#) – a website for Australian schools, managed by the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group (SSSC) which has representatives from all states and territories, including the Catholic and independent schooling sectors.

[eSmart](#) – assists schools to develop a culture that promotes the safe, smart and responsible use of technology.

[eSafety Commissioner](#) – provides a range of up-to-date information and resources, coupled with a complaints system to assist children who experience serious cyberbullying and image-based abuse.

[Australian Student Wellbeing Framework \(2018\)](#)

[Student Wellbeing Hub](#)

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV). (2018). [Positive Behaviour Guidelines](#)

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV). Child Safety Commitment Statement

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools. (2018). [eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities](#)

Catholic Education Melbourne. (2017). [Horizons of Hope: Vision and Context](#)

Catholic Education Melbourne. (2017). [Horizons of Hope: Wellbeing](#)

Catholic Education Melbourne. (2017). [Horizons of Hope: Learning Diversity](#)

Catholic Education Melbourne. (2018). [Identity and growth: A perspective for Catholic schools](#)

[Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards](#)

Related MACS Policies

- Enrolment Policy
- Student Behaviour Policy and related CECV Positive Behaviour Guidelines
- Pastoral Care of Students Policy
- MACS Duty of Care Guidelines

Responsible director	Director, Learning and Regional Services
Policy owner	General Manager, Student Wellbeing
Approving body/individual	MACS Board
Approval date	13 April 2022
Risk rating	High
Date of next review	April 2024

POLICY DATABASE INFORMATION	
Related documents	MACS Enrolment Policy Student Behaviour Policy and related CECV Positive Behaviour Guidelines Pastoral Care of Students Policy MACS Duty of Care Guidelines
Superseded documents	Anti-bullying Policy (including cyberbullying) – v1.0 - 2021
New policy	