

Against Bullying Policy

Revised on: December 2023

Review Date: December 2024

RATIONALE

We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and, at the core of the Church's pastoral action is a deep respect for the innate dignity and uniqueness of the individual:

The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic School." (John Paul II in Address to the First National Meeting of the Catholic School in Italy, in L'Osservatore Romano, 24 November 1991, p.4)

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Within St Margaret Mary's College there can be no place for ongoing harassment (see appendix) or bullying behaviour, and such behaviour will not be nor ignored.

THE NEED

National Definition of Bullying from the Australian Education Authorities / The State of Queensland 2018:

'Bullying is an ongoing misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power over one or more persons.'

Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

Bullying and harassment of any form, can have long term effects on the wellbeing of a person/s involved, including bystanders. It has been associated with low self-esteem, difficulties in forming relationships, increased rate of absenteeism, poor health, depression and harm. It is a problem of social significance that cannot be ignored.

St Margaret Mary's Diocesan College Board recognises that bullying can occur in all relationships within the school community and that the College community needs to continue education to recognise bullying in all its forms (both overt and covert), in person and online (in the form of cyberbullying) and to acknowledge its destructive potential in all relationships.

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

The College community affirms the dignity and worth of each of its members.

Each student has the right to be educated to her greatest potential free from fear of harassment or bullying from others.

Each member of the College community:

- has the right to be treated with respect and dignity
- has the right to feel secure and comfortable while at school, and travelling to and from school

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All members of the College community accept the responsibility to promote the development and maintenance of a school environment that is safe for everyone, and to take direct initiatives to prevent the incidence of bullying behaviour within the College.

The principles of healing and forgiveness are the feature of any process aimed at addressing bullying.

DIRECTIONS

As a systemic school, the College aims to create an understanding of what is acceptable behaviour and encourage parents to promote acceptable behaviour at home by:

- encouraging the development of students' empathetic responses to other people
- creating an atmosphere where all members of the school community will feel free to come forward to report incidents of bullying, and
- being future focused and responsive to emerging trends in the area of bullying.
- to investigate and deal with any complaints of harassment or bullying by any member of the College community
- to regularly run programs for all staff and students – educating them about the nature of bullying and clearly explaining procedures involved in reporting and investigating bullying in the College.
- to promote learning experiences that will highlight student wellbeing, self-esteem, strengthen skills in assertiveness, self-protection, restorative justice and conflict resolution
- aid in developing strategies to prevent bullying and / or coping with it when it occurs.
- to conduct regular surveys to monitor the incidence of bullying in the College community.
- to, as much as possible, deal with incidents to bullying in a restorative manner.

When required, counselling will be available for all parties involved in bullying incidents.

TYPES OF BULLYING

By legal definition, bullying is repeated behaviour that:

1. Is directed at an individual or a group (or is a pattern of behaviour)
2. Is often intimidating, humiliating, undermining, and
3. Is unwelcome and a reasonable person would consider the behaviour to be offensive, humiliating or intimidating for the individual or group. Whether or not the offender intended to offend is irrelevant.

The Australian Education Authorities / The State of Queensland (2022) outlines the following information about bullying regarding types, setting, means and visibility:

There are three types of bullying behaviour:

- **Verbal bullying (including online setting)** which includes discrimination (see appendix) and name calling or insulting someone about physical characteristics such as their weight or height, or other attributes including race, sexuality, culture, or religion

- **Physical bullying (including online setting)** which includes physical violence (see appendix) like hitting or otherwise hurting someone, shoving or intimidating or threatening another person, or damaging or stealing their belongings
- **Social bullying (including online setting)** which includes consistently excluding another person or sharing information or images that will have a harmful effect on the other person.

If any of these behaviours occur only once, or are part of a conflict between equals (no matter how inappropriate) they are not bullying. The behaviours alone don't define bullying.

Verbal, physical and social bullying can occur in person or online, directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly.

Means – direct and indirect

Bullying can be by direct or indirect means:

- **Direct bullying** occurs between the people involved, whereas indirect actions involve others, for example passing on insults or spreading rumours.
- **Indirect bullying** mostly inflicts harm by damaging another's social reputation, peer relationships and self-esteem.

Visibility – overt and covert

Bullying can be easy to see, called overt, or hidden from those not directly involved, called covert.

Overt bullying involves physical actions such as punching or kicking or observable verbal actions such as name-calling and insulting. Overt, direct, physical bullying is a common depiction of bullying (this is sometimes called 'traditional bullying'). But overt physical bullying may not be the most common type of bullying.

Covert bullying can be almost impossible for people outside the interpersonal interaction to identify. Covert bullying can include repeatedly using hand gestures and weird or threatening looks, whispering, excluding or turning your back on a person, restricting where a person can sit and who they can talk with. Covert social or verbal bullying can be subtle and even sometimes denied by a person who claims they were joking or 'just having fun'.

Relational aggression is covert and indirect. It occurs when an imbalance in perceived power is used to manipulate someone or make them feel excluded from the social group. In this instance, bullying is both covert and indirect, such as subtle social bullying, usually intentionally hidden, and very hard for others to see. This type of bullying is often unacknowledged at school, and can include spreading rumours, threatening, blackmailing, stealing friends, breaking secrets, gossiping and criticising clothes and personalities.

Relational aggression mostly inflicts harm by damaging another's social reputation, peer relationships and self-esteem, that is, through psychological harm rather than physical harm.

The Australian Education Authorities also **outline that behaviours that do not constitute bullying, but where students may still require support**, include:

- mutual arguments and disagreements (where there is no power imbalance)
- not liking someone or a single act of social rejection

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- one-off acts of meanness or spite
- isolated incidents of aggression, intimidation or violence.

Source: Australian Education Authorities / The State of Queensland (2022) *Bullying No Way!* <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/understanding-bullying/types-of-bullying>

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The College aims to implement clear, effective, consistent and restorative procedures aimed at reporting and attending to bullying. However, it is also acknowledged that all incidences are addressed as individual cases.

CONSEQUENCES

Level 1. Low level bullying, (teasing, exclusion, pushing etc.): Class teacher / Pastoral Care Teacher

Discussions with students involved with initial investigation; possible warning with a possible consequence (e.g. behaviour agreement); use restorative practices to work with students, parents contacted if appropriate; incident documented on the database.

Level 2. More serious bullying, or repeated low-level bullying by an individual: Pastoral Middle Leader

Investigation followed through discussions with students involved; possible consultation with CLT and relevant staff (counsellor, Indigenous Education Worker, etc.). Possible consequences may include: After School Reflection Activity, withdrawal, a community service followed by agreed restorative practice circle time. Behaviour will be monitored; counselling provided for parties concerned, parent interview, incident documented on the database.

Level 3. Continued serious bullying by individual after consequences: Assistant Principal – Pastoral

Discussions with students involved – investigation if necessary, warnings; timeout, parents of both parties contacted, consequences may include internal or external suspension, incident is documented.

Level 4. Continued bullying after warnings: Principal

Discussions with students involved, investigation, meeting with parents regarding student's continued enrolment at the College.

The College will be a safe working / learning environment where actions are supported to challenge bullying behaviour in any relationship.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

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Step 1 If the harassment is of a one-off minor nature, and you feel comfortable to do so, you may be able to show that it does not upset you by challenging the bullying behaviour in an appropriate and assertive manner. Alert the offender that their behaviour does not reflect the values of the College and is offensive. Remind them that this behaviour is not acceptable in society.

Step 2 If their behaviour does not stop and becomes repeated, there are a couple of options:

- a) Go with a friend of yours, someone you can rely on and report your concerns.
- b) Report the bullying incident on the BullyBox Student Intranet page with specific details
- c) Seek advice in person from your Pastoral Middle Leader or some other adult who may be able to work with you to resolve and restore the relationship.

Step 3 If things continue after this process, you may need to report the matter more formally to the College Principal for intervention with the student and their parents.

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

All members of our College community have a responsibility to ensure that ours is a safe environment. In line with our College mission, we are people of hope, who live compassionately and justly.

We all have a responsibility to take action to stop bullying, by being a defender and:

- actively reporting all incidents
- confronting offenders and telling them their actions are not appropriate or welcome in society
- being a defender by, NOT standing by and watching
- being a defender by, NOT laughing or condoning the harassment

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

Every staff member has a responsibility to protect children in their care and respond to an incidence of possible harm. Bullying and harassment leads to harm of an individual physically, socially or psychologically.

When a student or parent reports an incident of bullying or harassment, staff should complete a reporting form (located on Teachers Drive) with the student and follow these steps.

- Investigate and follow the levels of consequence depending on the findings from the investigation of the report
- Contact parents and all parties and outline the response of school in a timely manner
- Report on student database for all involved parties
- Continue to monitor the situation and relationship between parties involved

All students will receive the School Policy Against Bullying Document in the lead up to the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence 2024.

APPENDIX 1

DEFINITIONS - Sourced from: [Bullying No Way](https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/resource/fact-sheets/familyfactsheets/bnw-factsheet-1-bullying-definitions.pdf), Australian Education Authorities / The State of Queensland (2022), <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/resource/fact-sheets/familyfactsheets/bnw-factsheet-1-bullying-definitions.pdf>

Discrimination

Discrimination interferes with the legal right of all people to be treated fairly and have the same opportunities as everyone else.

Discrimination occurs when people are treated less favourably than others because of their:

- identity, race, culture or ethnic origin
- religion
- physical characteristics
- gender
- sexual orientation
- marital, parenting or economic status
- age
- ability or disability.

Examples of discrimination include where students:

- exclude children of a different culture from a friendship group
- don't let children of a different race sit near them at lunch
- refuse to include a student with a disability in their game.

Harassment

Harassment is behaviour that targets an individual or group due to their:

- identity, race, culture or ethnic origin
- religion
- physical characteristics
- gender
- sexual orientation
- marital, parenting or economic status
- age
- ability or disability.

It offends, humiliates, intimidates or creates a hostile environment. It may be:

- an ongoing pattern of behaviour or a single act
- directed randomly or towards the same person(s)
- intentional or unintentional.

Examples of harassment include where students:

- ridicule someone who doesn't speak English
- tease someone who wears different clothes due to religion/beliefs
- make suggestive comments or insults based on sex
- make fun of someone who needs a wheelchair or walking frame for mobility
- put down someone who is obese or very thin
- tell offensive jokes deliberately to put down a particular societal group.

Violence

Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person(s) that results in psychological harm, injury or in some cases death. It may involve provoked or unprovoked acts and can be a single incident, a random act or can occur over time.

Violence can be thought of in three basic categories:

- self-directed violence (e.g. self abuse and suicide)
- collective violence (e.g. social and political violence including war and terrorism)
- interpersonal violence (e.g. family and intimate partner violence, community violence involving an acquaintance or stranger).

Examples of violence a teacher may observe include:

- throwing items
- pushing
- pulling hair
- kicking
- biting
- hitting with fists
- using a sharp instrument
- hitting with an object

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