DEALING WITH BULLYING AND HARASSMENT (STUDENTS) POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

As a Catholic secondary school, our Christian ethos requires us to pursue the goals of tolerance and acceptance of differences in others. Students and staff have a right to feel safe and valued in their daily school lives. Each has a responsibility to protect the rights of others and expect the same in return. It is the objective of this policy to secure and maintain a safe and tolerant school environment.

AIMS OF THE POLICY

To attain this objective the policy aims to:

➢ Commit the school to address and engage with bullying related issues;
➢ Develop strategies to deter bullying behaviour within the school environment;
➢ Create awareness that bullying is a potential problem at every level of the school;
➢ Provide assurance that effective deterrent strategies can and will be implemented;
➢ Secure the trust of actual/potential victims of bullying to ensure prompt reporting;
➢ Empower victims to participate in constructive and satisfying resolutions; and
➢ Provide opportunities for perpetrators to change their attitudes and behaviour.

DEFINITION

"Bullying is an attitude rather than an act. It can be defined as bullying by measuring the effects the acts have on a vulnerable child." [Besag 1989]

**Characteristics of Bullying**

➢ Bullying behaviour may be verbal, written, physical, social or emotional.
  Its nature may be:

  - Verbal - name-calling, put-downs, threats (spoken, written or electronic)

  - Physical - hitting, tripping, punching, throwing objects, stealing

- Social - ignoring, hiding, ostracizing

- Psychological - stalking, threatening looks, spreading rumours, damaging possessions (MindMatters, 2000).

➢ It is characterised by an imbalance of power.
➢ It takes the form of repeated behaviours not only causing distress at the time it happens but also distress provoked by fear of future actions.
➢ It may take the form of socially acceptable behaviour, where a highly competitive approach makes others feel inferior and distressed.
➢ Bullying is increasingly taking place via cyber-technology ie internet or mobile phone.

Attitudes

Attitudes are settled opinions and behaviour. The notion of bullying as an attitude highlights the importance of the school culture in dealing with this problem. The solution to bullying depends to the greatest extent on developing an anti-bullying ethos within the school community as a whole.

Effects

Bullying involves an act. However, although the act is a necessary condition of bullying it is not a sufficient one. For an act to constitute bullying one must also consider the effect on the victim**. A person is bullied when s/he is exposed regularly and over time**, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons, and consequently feels unable to defend her/himself.

Intentions

Often the bully will defend him/herself by claiming no intent. The bully does not always intend the effects experienced by the victim. However, this is commonly due to a lack of empathy and is a characteristic of the problem. For this reason, it is advisable to limit an assessment of a bullying situation to the act and its effects.

Harassment

Harassment is any unwanted, unwelcome or uninvited behaviour which makes a person feel humiliated, intimidated or offended. (Adapted from Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia's Policy, Harassment in School, 1998). Harassment can be seen as one form of bullying.

PREVENTION

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education points out that:

> *"...a school is not only a place where one is given a choice of intellectual values, but a place where one has presented an array of values which are actually lived. The school must be a community whose values are communicated through the interpersonal and sincere relationships of its members and through both individual and corporative adherence to the outlook on life that permeates the school."*

Bullying is a public issue. It is a concern for all members of the College community and consequently each member of the community - staff, student and parent - is responsible for his/herself and for the wellbeing of all others. It is not just a private matter affecting only those directly involved. It is important that both teachers and parents model appropriate interpersonal behaviour for students as part of educating young people about bullying. This behaviour should also encourage open and effective communication. All members of the school community are expected and encouraged to contribute to an open and friendly atmosphere consistent with Christian values.

Education

Bullying prevention is given a high profile in our College. Staff will take appropriate opportunities to address the subject within the curriculum and in extracurricular activities. Integral to the educational approach will be the promotion of resilience. Issues pertaining to bullying are integrated in the Religious Education and Health curricula as appropriate.

Discipline

The College has a sound and consistent disciplinary system, which also plays a preventative role. The strategies used endeavour to ensure acceptable behaviours occurs at all times, not just when surveillance is in place. The College has avoided a custodial and over-rigorous style, which can create negative expectations among the students and be counterproductive. A punitive approach can model the very attitudes that we are seeking to eliminate from the school community.

Supervision

Supervision not only deters bullying behaviours but also promotes a positive school environment. **Active** supervision by staff makes them approachable and accessible to students. Behaviour, which, in the opinion of a member of staff, can be considered bullying, will result in intervention.

INTERVENTION

The intervention strategies adopted by the College have two primary purposes:

1   To empower the victim of bullying and ensure future safety.

2   To give the bully the opportunity and support to correct the behaviour of concern.

Processes

These processes include:

➢   immediate intervention by any observing member of staff
➢   appropriate intervention by any member of staff or parent to whom a child discloses bullying
➢   the involvement of the victim whenever possible
➢   referral to other appropriate people, eg House Coordinator, Pastoral Care Adviser
➢   personal counselling and support for the victim if necessary
➢   possible sanctions against the bully
➢   counselling for the bully
➢   possible withdrawal of privileges in cases of cyber bullying.

The place of each of the foregoing in our school processes is contained in the attached flow charts. Throughout the flow charts appropriate confidentiality is maintained.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Bullying is a concern for the entire school community and consequently all students, staff and parents have a role to play in eliminating it from our College.

Students should

➢   take appropriate steps to discourage or prevent bullying
➢   advice staff of bullying
➢   discuss these experiences with their parents
➢   guard their contact information. Don't give others unnecessary access to contact information eg phone numbers, email address, instant messaging, etc.

Staff should

➢ be alert to bullying behaviour and signs of distress in students
➢ respond to instances of bullying according to this policy
➢ model anti-bullying behaviour
➢ monitor use of computers.

Parents should

➢ encourage their children to be open with them about bullying behaviour
➢ be alert to signs of distress in their children
➢ avoid direct confrontation with other students and their parents
➢ advise the school of any concerns
➢ model anti-bullying behaviour for their children
➢ monitor and educate their children regarding internet and phone useage.

Principal should

➢ ensure that the staff are aware of the Dealing with Bullying and Harassment (Students) policy