Respectful Relationships Anti Bullying Policy

March 2024

Rationale

Our Lady of Mercy College (OLMC) recognises the importance of demonstrating respect for the dignity of each person and for fostering an environment where a sense of belonging is experienced by all in the community. The principle that the person is made in the image and likeness of God is central to our mission.

The College is committed to building and nurturing a safe, supportive and empowering community for all its members. Bullying behaviour can offend and harm others, cause them pain, embarrass and endanger them, or damage their self-esteem. Bullying behaviour seriously undermines the ethos of the College, is not acceptable, and will not be tolerated.

This policy identifies the interconnectedness of the characteristic of quality Catholic learning and teaching. It articulates how bullying is defined and addressed, including the means taken to prevent incidents and the response taken when an incident occurs.

This policy is directed to all members of the OLMC community – students, staff and parents –with the term 'parents' being inclusive of guardians and carers who have parental responsibility for a student. The expectation is that all will collaborate in supporting its intentions and procedures.

Principles

- It is essential that the College creates and maintains a respectful, safe and supportive learning environment that promotes student wellbeing, personal growth and positive self-esteem amongst our diverse range of learners.

- 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.

- Each member of the College community has a right to enjoy healthy, respectful relationships and to feel safe from any form of verbal, physical and emotional abuse.

- The College encourages a culture that is firm about unacceptable behaviour. 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.

- The College actively promotes anti bullying messages, alerting students and staff of the need to be vigliant. All members of our College community must be aware of the possibility of bullying and take action to prevent bullying if it is reasonably foreseeable.

- Encouraging the reporting of unacceptable behaviour is essential to the effective implementation of this policy.

- Bullying behaviour contravenes OLMC's Mission, Vision and Values, which include aspirations for appropriate behaviour. In essence, all College members seek to:
  - be hospitable to all;

- o respect the dignity of each person;
- o act for justice in our community;
- o nurture generosity of heart and a spirit of kindness;
- o understand others and respond to them in times of need;
- o know the power of forgiveness and offer this to others;
- o live authentically, guided by the values taught by Jesus.

- Bullying is a learned behaviour which is unacceptable but which can be changed. The College takes an educative approach to preventing bullying behaviours and manages all disrespectful behaviour, including bullying, using Restorative Practices. Restorative Practices focus on learning how to take responsibility for one's actions and their impact on others, and ways to repair the harm where relationships have broken down. A restorative approach also aims to develop student resilience in the midst and in the aftermath of harmful and distressing experiences.

- OLMC is committed to:
  - promoting appropriate standards of behaviour;
  - upholding both prevention and intervention measures with respect to bullying;
  - building and nurturing a community that values diversity;
  - treating complaints of bullying in a sensitive, fair, timely and confidential manner;
  - working with students to build resilience and manage difficult situations;
  - ensuring that staff are appropriately trained to manage incidents through an understanding of the use of Restorative Practices;
  - encouraging the reporting of behaviour which breaches this policy;
  - encouraging ethical and responsible use of Learning Technologies in the school environment;
  - promoting communications that are respectful of each person's human dignity.

Definitions

Bullying
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, and does so on more than one occasion. Forms of bullying include:

- **Physical bullying –** Pushing, shoving, fighting, pinching and any other unwelcome physical contact used intentionally to intimated 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 and repeatedly leaving a person out of activities is a most hurtful form of bullying;

- **Visual Bullying –** Use of offensive notes or material, including 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 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.

- **Changes in peer group dynamics and composition:** it is not unusual for a shift in friendship groups to occur as students move through adolescence and interests and personalities develop.

Procedures

Responsibilities: The College

OLMC will encourage students, staff and parents to report bullying and cyber-bullying to the student's Pastoral Teacher or Year Level/House Coordinator. Staff will respond to all reported incidents of bullying, perceived or actual, sensitively, fairly and promptly by:

- investigating the report in a manner that respects the dignity and privacy of those involved;

- keeping a written record of any bullying investigation and maintaining records of incidents and related interventions;

- implementing an Anti-Bullying action plan as part of the response pathway;

- notifying parents of bullying incidents involving their child;

- contacting the Police/Police Youth Liaison Officer if the bullying situation has involved violence, threat of harm or alleged criminal conduct;

- review incidents and practices each year to promote safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments;

- promoting student voice and empowerment in classrooms to discuss matters associated with bullying, cyber bullying, safety and wellbeing;

- reviewing and evaluating the College's policies and procedures for anti-bullying and the responsible use of technology to ensure they are working effectively.

Responsibilities: Staff

OLMC staff aim to treat all members of the College community with dignity and respect. They seek to build respectful relationships and respond effectively and sensitively to the needs of each student by:

- implementing College policies and procedures for student anti-bullying and responsible use of technology;

- remaining vigilant in how students are using technology;

- positive modelling and the promotion of appropriate behaviour;

- responding promptly and appropriately to reported incidents of bullying;

- 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;

- 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

OLMC staff will encourage and support students to:

- observe the anti-bullying and responsible use of technology policies and 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 the implications of social networking practices that identify the College by name or image or implication;
- in age-appropriate circumstances, keep evidence of alleged bullying and produce it on request (for example phone text messages).

Responsibilities: Parents

College staff will work in partnership with parents in responding to incidents of bullying. They will encourage parents to:

- reinforce the College's expectations of using technology and social media sites appropriately and respectfully;
- 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) or e-Safety Commission and, as relevant, to the College;
- contact the College immediately through the Pastoral Leader or Year Level Coordinator/House Coordinator if they know of any bullying incident;
- act respectively to all members of the school community at all times.

Prevention and Intervention Strategies

The Head of Student Wellbeing is responsible for ensuring that Year Level and House Coordinators and all Pastoral Leaders implement programs and strategies that build shared understandings amongst students and staff of prevention, intervention and resolution procedures to be followed if they suspect or experience bullying behaviour. The College's pastoral program and strategies will include education in:
- Respectful relationships
- What behaviours constitute bullying
- The impact of bullying
- Safe and supportive bystander responses
- Positive social problem-solving skills
- Reporting procedures
- Restorative practices.

College Investigation and Resolution Processes

All reported incidents of bullying will be managed on an individual basis and will be investigated and followed up by the student(s)' Pastoral Leader or Year/House Coordinator.

The investigation and follow-up may include:
- interviews with all parties – the victim, the alleged perpetrator and witnesses
- notifying parents of the students involved
- notifying relevant staff and student counsellors
- reporting directly to the Head of Student Wellbeing or Principal if the harm caused by the incident(s) is deemed to be severe, and/or if there is a high risk of escalated bullying behaviours.

A restorative conference between the parties affected will be offered to assist in the reconciliation

OLMC Policy: Respectful Relationships Anti Bullying

process. If the bullying behaviour continues beyond this process, disciplinary consequences will be applied in accordance with OLMC's *Student Behaviour Management Policy.*

Some wrongful behaviours of a serious nature are by definition criminal offences and consultation with Police will occur.

An outline of the reporting process and the College's management of bullying incidents is presented in **Appendix 1.**

In instances where students experience or engage in online behaviour that is damaging to themselves or other students (psychologically or emotionally), College staff will also be guided by the Department of Education and Training (DET) Bully Stoppers guidelines, *Step-by-Step Guide: Online incidents of inappropriate behaviour affecting students.* Refer **Appendix 2.**

Appendices

1. Overview of OLMC Anti-Bullying Procedures
2. Department of Education Bully Stoppers guidelines, Step-by-Step Guide: Online incidents of inappropriate behaviour affecting students

Related Policies and Guidelines

- MEL_OLMC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- MEL_OLMC Child Safety and Wellbeing Procedures
- OLMC Child Safe Policy – Child Friendly Version
- Child Safety Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy
- Mercy Education Ltd & OLMC Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers
- Mercy Education Ltd & OLMC Parent Code of Conduct
- Student Wellbeing Policy
- Student Behaviour Management Policy
- Student Responsible Use of Digital Technologies, Devices and Social Media
- Student Drug Use: Intervention and Management Policy
- Counselling Services Policy
- Complaints Resolution Policy

Policy Ratified:	**May 2011**
Policy Reviewed:	**March 2024**
Policy Review Date:	**March 2026**
Person Responsible:	**Head of Student Wellbeing**

Overview of OLMC Anti-Bullying Procedures

Incident Reports and Response

1. Disclosure and Initial Response
- Student, bystander or parent reports incident(s) to a staff member.
- Staff member provides initial support to the student affected.
- If the reported behaviour constitutes suspected or actual bullying, staff member refers the matter to the Pastoral Leader and/or Year/House Coordinator of the students involved.
- Pastoral Leader and Year/House Coordinator may in turn choose to involve the Head of Student Wellbeing in managing and resolving the matter.

2. Initial Investigation
Pastoral Leader and/or Year/House Coordinator gather more information about the incident(s) from the students involved and determines whether the alleged behaviour constitutes bullying. A key reference in assessing the behaviour is OLMC's *Respectful Relationships Anti Bullying Policy.*

If the reported incident(s) does not constitute bullying behaviour, the students involved may require interventions and support to resolve their differences and/or modify their behaviours. The Pastoral Leader and/or Year/House Coordinator will implement a restorative practices procedure and might also apply sanctions in accordance with OLMC's *Behaviour Management Policy.*

If bullying behaviour is established, a more formal investigation procedure and response will apply. See below.

Management of Bullying Behaviour

1. **Investigation.** The Head of Student Wellbeing and the students' Year/House Coordinator may:
   - interview all parties involved in the incident(s), including bystanders. In some instances:
   - written statements from all parties may be required;
   - parents of the students involved may be notified and involved in the interviews.

2. **Sanctions and support.** The Head of Student Wellbeing and the students' Year/House Coordinator will determine recommendations for action, such as counselling, social skills training, a specific Anti Bullying Plan/Agreement, disciplinary action.

3. **Restorative practices.** A restorative conference between the parties affected will be offered to assist in the short- and longer-term reconciliation process.

4. **Monitoring.** The Head of Student Wellbeing and the students' Year/House Coordinator will monitor compliance with recommended actions (e.g. Anti Bullying Plan/Agreement) and the effectiveness of any restorative actions that have been agreed to at the restorative conference. If the bullying behaviour continues beyond this process, disciplinary consequences will be applied in accordance with *OLMC's Student Behaviour Management Policy.*

5. **Principal involvement.** The Principal may become involved in the management of a bullying incident if the harm caused is deemed to be severe, and/or if there is a high risk of escalated bullying behaviours. The Principal's involvement may also include police notifications. Some wrongful behaviours of a serious nature are by definition criminal offences and consultation with police will occur.

Step-by-Step Guide: Online Incidents of Inappropriate Behaviour Affecting Students

VICTORIA State Government | Bully Stoppers: Make a stand, Lend a hand.

Step 1

Identify Concerns

Is the student distressed?

A student may feel distressed by events including cyberbullying, sexting, exposure to pornographic images or a breach of the school's **Bully Prevention Policy** or **Student Engagement Policy**.

Has a student been exposed to inappropriate behaviour?

A student may have been exposed to and affected by inappropriate behaviour online. This may put them at risk of suffering significant physical, psychological or emotional harm. They may be in need of immediate protection.

Has a student engaged in inappropriate behaviour affecting ANOTHER student?

A student may have engaged in inappropriate behaviour online that may cause psychological or emotion harm to ANOTHER student(s). All students may be in need of immediate protection.

Has a student engaged in inappropriate behaviour affecting THEMSELVES?

A student may have engaged in inappropriate behaviour online that could be psychologically and/or emotionally damaging to THEMSELVES (e.g. sexting). They may be in need of immediate protection.

Has the student engaged in CRIMINAL behaviour?

A student may have engaged in inappropriate behaviour online that could be deemed as CRIMINAL activity.

*Please note: an incident of concern may include one or more of the above.

Step 2

Take Action

Ensure the student is safe

If you suspect or have identified an incident of concern, it is important to first make sure the student/s are in a safe environment.

Further inquire into the incident

Inquire into the inappropriate incident. This may include discussions with all staff and students who have been directly or indirectly involved in the incident and/or its effects.
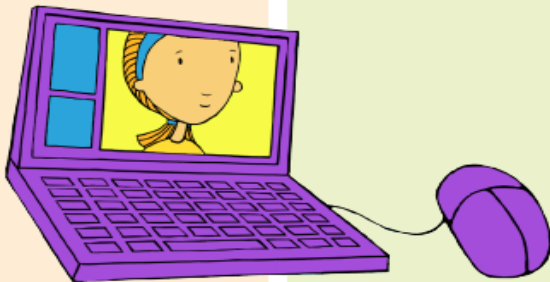
Step 3

Contact the Appropriate Supports

Leadership team

If your inquiry leads you to believe that a concern is real, but it is NOT CRIMINAL then immediately advise and/or consult a member of the school's leadership team to report the incident and plan the appropriate response and support.

The Victoria Police

If your inquiry leads you to believe that a CRIMINAL offence may have occurred, contact the Police.

In such cases seek advice about contacting the parents of all students involved in the incident.

If a school is unsure whether an incident should be reported, the Police will advise the school as to whether they will investigate or whether the school should handle the situation.

Security Services Unit

All reportable incidents should be reported to Security Services Unit. If a school is unsure whether an incident is criminal or not they can also contact the Security Services Unit. This will alert regional staff.

Phone: **(03) 9589 6266**

Step 4

Respond and Provide Support

Support all involved people

Provide reasonable and ongoing wellbeing support to all students and staff who were involved in or witness to the incident.

Refer to the School's Policy

In responding to online incidents of inappropriate behaviour, Principals and teachers should refer to their **Bullying Prevention and/or Student Engagement Policy** and follow the appropriate processes and procedures.

Each Victorian government school has developed a **Bullying Prevention and/or Student Engagement Policy** that sets out the rights, responsibilities and shared expectations of everyone in the school community, including students, parents, teachers and school staff. The policy clearly defines the consequences for students who behave inappropriately. (online and offline)

Work with Leadership Team

Work closely with your school's **Leadership and/or Student Wellbeing Team** to discuss strategies that can be used to respond to and support ALL students at risk from the inappropriate behaviour. This may include counselling and support or the development of a **Behaviour Support Plan** to implement targeted strategies.

Keep a record of the Behaviour Support Plan, make notes on any relevant observations, and review it as necessary.

For more information, visit Behaviour Support Plans:
www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/teachplans.aspx.

Contact Parents

Where appropriate, contact the parents of all students involved. If a school is unsure whether parents should be contacted, the **Department's Legal Division** or **Security Services Unit** can assist to make a decision.

Consult Regional Staff

Contact your student wellbeing or Community Liason Officers in your Regional Office for support.

North Eastern Victoria Region

Benalla: **(03) 8392 9500**
Glen Waverly: **(03) 8392 9300**

North Western Victoria Region

Bendigo: **(03) 5440 3111**
Coburg: **(03) 9488 9488**

South Eastern Victoria Region

Dandenong: **(03) 8765 5600**
Moe: **(03) 5127 0400**

South Western Victoria Region

Ballarat: **(03) 5337 8444**
West Footscray: **(03) 8397 0300**
Geelong: **(03) 5225 1000**

Further Information

Remember to Record

At all times remember to:
- Record the incident. (e.g. screen shots of the incident, notes from the interviews)
- Record the process taken to resolve the incident (e.g. steps taken to remove content, mediation attempts).

Bully Stoppers

For more information visit DET's Bully Stoppers website:
www.education.vic.gov.au/bullystoppers

Security Services Unit

A 24 hour/7 day a week single reference point to report emergency matters and critical incidents including criminal and unwanted activities.

Phone: **(03) 9589 6266**