



## Bullying Prevention Policy

### Purpose

Maffra Secondary College is committed to providing a safe and respectful learning environment where bullying will not be tolerated. We aim to foster an inclusive and positive learning environment, enabling strong relationships to be formed among students, staff and families.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- explain the definition of bullying so that there is shared understanding amongst all members of the school community
- make clear that no form of bullying in our school will be tolerated
- outline the strategies and programs in place at our school to build a positive school culture and prevent bullying behaviour
- ask that everyone in our school community be alert to signs and evidence of bullying behaviour, and understands the importance of reporting bullying behaviour to school staff
- ensure that all reported incidents of bullying are appropriately investigated and addressed
- ensure that support is provided to students who may be affected by bullying behaviour (including targets, bystanders, witnesses and students engaging in bullying behaviour)
- seek parental and peer group support in addressing and preventing bullying behaviour.

When responding to bullying behaviour, Maffra Secondary College aims to:

- be proportionate, consistent and responsive
- stop the bullying from happening again
- restore the relationships between the students involved.

We acknowledge that school staff owe a duty of care to students to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm, which can include harm that may be caused by bullying behaviour.

### Scope

This policy addresses how Maffra Secondary College aims to prevent, address and respond to student bullying behaviour. We recognise that there are many other types of inappropriate student behaviours that do not meet the definition of bullying which are also unacceptable at our school. These other inappropriate behaviours will be managed in accordance with our other behavioural management processes. It is important to note that the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) framework underpins and informs all student management processes at our school (including bullying).

This policy applies to all school activities, including camps and excursions.

### Definitions

#### **Bullying**

In 2018 the Education Council of the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the following definition of bullying for use by all Australian schools:

*Bullying is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or*

*psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening.*

*Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert). Bullying behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (for example, through sharing of digital records)*

*Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders. **Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.***

Bullying has three main features:

- It involves a misuse of power in a relationship
- It is ongoing and repeated, and
- It involves behaviours that can cause harm.

There are four main types of bullying behaviour:

- Physical – examples include hitting, pushing, shoving or intimidating or otherwise physically hurting another person, damaging or stealing their belongings. It includes threats of violence.
- Verbal/written – examples include name-calling or insulting someone about an attribute, quality or personal characteristic.
- Social (sometimes called relational or emotional bullying) – examples include deliberately excluding someone, spreading rumours, sharing information that will have a harmful effect on the other person and/or damaging a person's social reputation or social acceptance.
- Cyberbullying – any form of bullying behaviour that occurs online or via a mobile device. It can be verbal or written, and can include threats of violence as well as images, videos and/or audio.

Bullying can be a form of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia or other type of social prejudice when the behaviour is targeted at an individual or group because of a personal characteristic, such as race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.

For further information about bullying, refer to: [Bully Stoppers \(education.vic.gov.au\)](http://BullyStoppers.education.vic.gov.au)

### **Other distressing and inappropriate behaviours**

Many distressing and inappropriate behaviours may not constitute bullying even though they are unpleasant. Students who are involved in or who witness any distressing and inappropriate behaviours should report their concerns to school staff and our school will follow our usual behaviour management processes and/or this Bullying Prevention Policy where the behaviour constitutes bullying.

**Mutual conflict** involves an argument or disagreement between people with no imbalance of power. In incidents of mutual conflict, generally, both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the issue. Unresolved mutual conflict can develop into bullying if one of the parties targets the other repeatedly in retaliation.

**Social rejection or dislike** is not bullying unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others.

**Single-episode acts** of nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. However, single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression are not acceptable behaviours at our school and may have serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour.

**Harassment** is language or actions that are demeaning, offensive or intimidating to a person. It can take many forms, including sexual harassment and disability harassment.

**Discrimination** is behaviour that treats someone unfavourably because of a personal characteristic (for example, race, religious belief or activity, disability, sex or intersex status, gender identity or sexual orientation).

## **Bullying Prevention**

Maffra Secondary College has a number of programs and strategies in place to build a positive and inclusive school culture and relationships to promote wellbeing. As a SWPBS school, we strive to foster a school culture that prevents bullying behaviour by modelling, encouraging and teaching behaviour that demonstrates acceptance, kindness and respect.

Bullying prevention at Maffra Secondary College is proactive and is supported by research that indicates that a whole school, multifaceted approach is the most effect way to prevent and address bullying. At our school:

- We ensure a whole-school approach to teaching social and emotional skills using the Respectful Relationships initiative, which aims to embed a culture of respect and equality across the school
- We celebrate the diverse backgrounds of members of our school community to promote mutual respect and social cohesion, using initiatives such as Harmony Day, and Wear it Purple Day to build awareness of diversity, educate, and promote support and inclusion of all students
- We have a strong student leadership team who work hard to listen to concerns of students across the whole school community and build an inclusive student culture. Student leaders include a range of students across every year level.
- We strive to build strong partnerships between the school, families and the broader community that means all members work together to ensure the safety of students.
- Teachers are encouraged to incorporate classroom management strategies that discourage bullying and promote positive behaviour using our SWPBS tier 1 strategies
- Help seeking behaviours are explicitly taught and celebrated
- We have the 'Stymie' system in place for students to report those at risk of harm (anonymously if they wish)
- We have a well-resourced wellbeing team who triage student wellbeing needs and create plans to support students as needed, including supporting students in restorative conversations
- In the classroom, our social and emotional learning curriculum teaches students what constitutes bullying and how to respond to bullying behaviour assertively. This promotes resilience, assertiveness, conflict resolution and problem solving.
- We promote upstander behaviour as a way of empowering our students to positively and safely take appropriate action when they see or hear of a peer being bullied.
- We regularly monitor student traffic on the school's computer network to identify and address potentially problematic digital behaviours
- All students are provided with individual network and computer logins and passwords, and are unable to access traffic external to the school network
- Yard duty expectations of staff are clear, including active monitoring and promoting positive interactions between students.
- We have 10 expected behaviours, linked to our school values, in place for all members of our school community that are explicitly taught to students and actively promoted by staff in all areas of our school.

- Restorative practices are used with students, staff and families, to ensure that an approach of mutual understanding and ownership is fostered when addressing interpersonal issues or areas of conflict.
- Students and staff are encouraged to report bullying incidents involving themselves or others
- Parents are encouraged to contact the school if they become aware of bullying
- Designated safe and quiet spaces can be identified and made available for students to access at recess and lunch, if and when required
- Students are acknowledged for positive behaviours using our SWPBS systems and processes, including the use of posi-slips for demonstrating the school values
- School data is monitored regularly to identify areas of concern and to target needed change

## **Incident Response – Processes for Reporting and Managing Bullying**

### **Reporting concerns**

Bullying is not tolerated at our school. We ensure bullying behaviour is identified and addressed with appropriate and proportionate consequences. All bullying complaints will be taken seriously and responded to sensitively.

Students who may be experiencing bullying behaviour, or students who have witnessed bullying behaviour, are encouraged to report their concerns to school staff or another trusted adult as soon as possible.

Our ability to effectively reduce and eliminate bullying behaviour is greatly affected by students and/or parents and carers reporting concerning behaviour as soon as possible, so that the responses implemented are timely and appropriate in the circumstances.

We encourage students to speak to their year level coordinator in the first instance; however, students are welcome to discuss their concerns with any trusted member of staff including their subject teachers or wellbeing staff.

Parents or carers who develop concerns that their child is involved in, or has witnessed bullying behaviour at school should contact the Year Level Coordinator or an Assistant Principal.

### **Investigations and Recording**

When notified of alleged bullying behaviour, school staff will ensure the following:

- 1) Listen and record details the allegations / incidents using Compass, ensuring the following:
  - Acknowledge the student's feelings and support as needed
  - Inform the student that the YLC will be notified and will investigate.
  - Inform the student that action will be taken if bullying has occurred, in accordance with this policy.
- 2) Inform the relevant Year Level Coordinator.
- 3) The Year Level Coordinator will investigate the allegations in a timely manner and ascertain whether bullying has taken place, using the definitions outlined in this policy. Investigations will usually include:
  - speaking to the those involved in the allegations, including the target/s, the students allegedly engaging in bullying behaviour/s and any witnesses to the incidents
  - speaking to the parent/carer(s) of the students involved
  - speaking to the teachers of the students involved
  - taking detailed notes of all discussions for future reference and filing on Compass
  - consulting the wellbeing team and/or AP

- 4) If, in fact, the allegations do not constitute bullying, the YLC will take the opportunity to educate the student around the definition of bullying and what behaviours do and do not constitute bullying. Wellbeing staff can support this if needed.
- 5) If bullying is established, the YLC will touch base with the student to acknowledge that bullying has occurred and to let them know that action will be taken in accordance with this policy
- 6) The YLC will offer the student (and any affected witnesses) wellbeing support
- 7) The YLC will follow the response process outlined below.

It is important to note that serious bullying, including serious cyberbullying, is a criminal offence and may be referred to Victoria Police. For more information, see: [Brodie's Law](#).

### **Responses to Bullying Behaviours – Bullying Management Process**

Please note that bullying can be complex in nature and there are, at times, mitigating factors or individual circumstances that may impact on this process and how it is implemented, such as:

- the age, maturity and individual circumstances of the students involved
- the severity and frequency of the bullying, and the impact it has had on the target student
- whether the student/s engaging in bullying behaviour have displayed similar behaviour before
- whether the bullying took place in a group or one-to-one context
- whether the students engaging in bullying behaviour demonstrates insight or remorse for their behaviour
- the alleged motive of the behaviour

When the Year Level Coordinator has sufficient information to understand the circumstances of the alleged bullying and the students involved, the following process will be followed.

- 1) The Year Level Coordinator will consult with the wellbeing team and relevant AP around the incident, including any previous knowledge of the students involved and any similar incidents that may have occurred in the past
- 2) All students who have been established to be instigating bullying behaviours will be addressed by the YLC and/or AP. These students will:
  - Be informed of this policy and the processes within
  - Be educated about what bullying is, in general terms, and how it can cause harm
  - Be educated around the impact of their specific actions in this case and how they have caused harm (if a restorative practice meeting is appropriate and wanted by all parties, this will be arranged and can be facilitated by the wellbeing team)
  - Be offered individual wellbeing support to help them understand and explore underlying reasons for their behaviour (if appropriate)
- 3) Students who have instigated bullying will:
  - Be warned that future incidents that are established to be bullying will lead to suspension from school, as the school needs to ensure a safe environment for all students
- 4) Parents/guardians of students who instigated bullying will be contacted by the YLC, who will
  - Inform them of this policy and send it to them
  - Ensure they understand the nature and details of the bullying incident, the harm caused, and that future episodes of bullying will lead to suspension from school.
- 5) YLC /AP will arrange a return to school meeting, during which a behaviour support plan will be created including strategies to prevent future bullying incidents. Education and support to help the student understand their behaviours are paramount.

- 6) YLC / AP will prepare and enact a safety plan, if necessary, to restrict future contact between involved students. All parties will be educated around this and a copy sent to parents / guardians, teachers, and pinned to Compass,
- 7) Restorative meeting / mediation between students can be arranged as appropriate or as wanted by those involved. The objective of restorative practice is to repair relationships that have been damaged by bringing about a sense of remorse and restorative action on the part of the person who has bullied someone and forgiveness by the person who has been bullied. Mediation is only suitable if all students are involved voluntarily and demonstrate a willingness to engage in the mediation process.
- 8) Students involved will have behaviour monitored for an appropriate time and follow up action taken if necessary.

Maffra Secondary College understands the importance of monitoring and following up on the progress of students who have been involved in or affected by bullying behaviour. Where appropriate, school staff will also endeavour to provide parents and carers with updates on the management of bullying incidents.

## **Communication**

Under the VRQA's Guidelines to the Minimum Standards for School Registration, DET schools are required to have evidence of how we communicate this policy to staff, students, parents, guardians and the school community. This section of the bullying policy addresses this:

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website
- Sent home to parents via email
- Published on Compass newsfeed to parents, staff and students
- Discussed at staff meetings
- Included in school newsletter
- Made available in hard copy from main office upon request
- Included in new staff induction resources

The following websites and resources provide useful information on prevention and responding to bullying, as well as supporting students who have been the target of bullying behaviours:

- [Bully Stoppers](#)
- [Report racism or religious discrimination in schools](#)
- [Kids Helpline](#)
- [ReachOut Australia](#)
- [Lifeline](#)
- [Bullying. No way!](#)
- [Student Wellbeing Hub](#)
- [eSafety Commissioner](#)
- [Australian Student Wellbeing Framework](#)

## **Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years, or earlier as required following an incident or analysis of new research or school data relating to bullying, to ensure that the policy remains up to date, practical and effective.

Data to inform this review will be collected through:

- discussion and consultation with students and parent/carers
- Attitudes to School Survey
- DET school staff survey (SSS)
- assessment of other school-based data, including the number of reported incidents of bullying in each year group and the effectiveness of the responses implemented (COMPASS data)
- Parent Opinion Survey

Proposed amendments to this policy will be discussed with school council and leadership teams (including student leaders)

### **Policy Review and Approval**

Policy last reviewed	March 2023
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School leadership team</li><li>• Year level coordinators</li><li>• Student leadership team</li><li>• School council</li></ul>
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	March 2025 (every 2 years)