St Columba's College

BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION POLICY

Introduction

St Columba's College is a Mary Aikenhead Ministries College in the tradition of the Sisters of Charity. We are called to develop in each member of our community a contemporary understanding and application of the charism of Mary Aikenhead and the spirituality of the Sisters of Charity, and the Mary Aikenhead Ministries' Mission and Vision, and values of justice, love, compassion and hope.

Purpose and Objectives

A key focus of Catholic schools is a commitment to nurturing the individual growth and development of the whole person. At St Columba's College we believe in building a culture which respects the dignity of every person and the promotion of good relationships between staff and students, and students with students. This also includes the establishment of formal pastoral care structures, procedures and practices that promote the personal growth and development of students.

Policy

St Columba's College recognises its duty to provide a safe, inclusive, positive and respectful learning environment where individual differences and diversity within the College are respected and accepted. The College recognises that bullying and other harmful behaviours can affect students differently and will consider the unique and intersecting needs of diverse student cohorts and individuals who may experience additional risk factors.

Bullying and other harmful behaviours are not tolerated at St Columba's College. All observed or reported harmful behaviour will be taken seriously and responded to appropriately, whether or not the behaviour meets the definition of bullying.

It is our policy that:

- bullying and other harmful behaviours be managed through a whole-of-College community approach involving students, parents/carers, the school workforce and the wider College community, using Restorative Practices where appropriate to restore relationships, repair harm and teach social responsibility
- evidence-based bullying prevention and early intervention strategies be implemented continuously, with age-appropriate, culturally and developmentally appropriate teaching that empowers students, parents/carers and the school workforce to recognise and respond to bullying and other harmful behaviours appropriately
- response strategies be evidence-based, trauma-informed, relationship-focused, justifiable and tailored to the unique circumstances of each incident, with the safety and wellbeing of all those involved prioritised
- staff are positive role models who promote and uphold our zero bullying culture
- bullying prevention and intervention strategies are reviewed routinely using evidence, data and feedback to evaluate impact, identify emerging issues and improve practice.

- the College seeks and considers the perspectives of students, parents/carers and the school workforce in the development, implementation and review of this policy and related anti-bullying strategies, appropriate to the local College context

Implementation

The College will implement this policy consistent with the National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools and applicable Victorian and Catholic education requirements. The College will publish its current bullying prevention and intervention policy and related procedures.

This policy is implemented through a combination of:

- trauma-informed professional learning, training and guidance for the school workforce, including time and support to undertake prevention and response activities
- student and parent/carer education and information
- effective incident reporting procedures
- effective, timely and proportionate management of bullying and other harmful behaviours, including early safety and support planning
- the creation of a 'no-bullying' culture within the College community
- effective, secure and privacy-aware record keeping that outlines actions taken and supports monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement
- initiation of proportionate support, restorative, educational, behaviour-change and/or disciplinary actions, where necessary, with clear escalation pathways

Bullying Prevention Strategies

St Columba's College recognises that the implementation of whole-College prevention strategies is the most effective way of eliminating, or at least minimising incidents of bullying within our community.

The following initiatives form part of our overall bullying prevention strategy and our strategy to create a 'no-bullying' culture within the College:

- a structured curriculum that provides age-appropriate, culturally and developmentally appropriate information and skills relating to Healthy Relationships (including Respectful Relationships), social and emotional skills, digital safety and citizenship, bullying and other harmful behaviours (including cyberbullying), and prevention and early intervention strategies, to students over the course of the academic year
- trauma-informed professional learning, training and ongoing guidance for the school workforce, including teaching and non-teaching staff, in bullying and other harmful behaviours, risk and protective factors, prevention, early intervention and appropriate response strategies
- regular provision of accessible information to students, parents/carers and the school workforce about bullying and other harmful behaviours, prevention, reporting pathways, available supports and how the College will respond and communicate actions
- promotion of a safe, inclusive and respectful environment that encourages positive relationships, communication, student voice and partnership between students, staff and parents/carers
- promotion of responsible bystander and upstander behaviour amongst students, staff and parents/carers, including clear expectations about reporting and seeking help
- reporting of observed or alleged bullying and other harmful behaviours by students, bystanders, parents/carers and the school workforce is encouraged and made accessible through multiple reporting channels (as specified below)
- regular risk assessments and collection and analysis of student voice and other relevant data are undertaken to identify bullying and other harmful behaviours, risk factors and issues that may ordinarily go unnoticed by staff, and to inform targeted prevention and early intervention strategies

- records of reported bullying and other harmful behaviour incidents are securely maintained and analysed to identify patterns, risk factors and areas requiring targeted prevention, early intervention or additional support, while maintaining privacy and confidentiality obligations
- education of staff, students and parents/carers on health conditions to promote understanding and to reduce stigma and fear
- Peer Support program for Year 7 students and twinned House Group Activities to support inter year level interactions
- House Representative structure and meetings for student to raise concerns about concerns including safety and bullying.
- Consistent Classroom Routines which include designated seating plans and groups for 7-10
- Clear reporting procedures within the Student Management Guidelines for students, staff and parents to report and have follow up for incidents.
- anti-bullying posters are displayed strategically within the College
- promotion of student awareness and a 'no-bullying' environment by participating in events such as the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence.

Signs of Bullying

Major behavioural changes in a student may be indicative of bullying. Such behavioural changes may include:

- crying at night and having nightmares
- refusing to talk when asked "What's wrong?"
- having unexplained bruises, cuts or scratches
- an unwillingness or refusal to go to school
- feeling ill in the mornings
- a decline in quality of school work
- becoming withdrawn and lacking confidence
- beginning to bully siblings
- acting unreasonably.

Parents/carers are encouraged to recognise signs of bullying and notify the College through a trusted staff member immediately (such as a House Leader), if they suspect their child is a victim of bullying.

Reporting Bullying

Students and their parents/carers are sometimes reluctant to pursue bullying incidents, for fear that it will only make matters worse.

A key part of the College's bullying prevention and intervention strategy is to encourage reporting of bullying incidents as well as providing assurance to students who experience bullying (and parents/carers) that:

- bullying is not tolerated within the College
- their concerns will be taken seriously
- the College has a clear strategy for dealing with bullying issues.

Bullying and other harmful behaviour concerns can be reported to the College verbally or in writing through any of the following avenues. Students, parents/carers and staff may use the reporting pathway they feel is the safest and most accessible:

- informing a student's House Leader
- informing a trusted teacher
- informing a Student Counsellor / College Psychologist
- informing the College Social Worker
- Informing the Student Wellbeing Officer

- informing the Director of Students
- informing the Head of Students
- informing the Deputy Principal.

Information should include the names of students involved (if known), date, time and behaviour. See Procedures for responding to Bullying for how reports are managed.

Reports will be taken seriously and responded to in accordance with this policy.

The College will communicate actions taken and relevant next steps to those involved or impacted to the greatest extent possible, while maintaining privacy, confidentiality and legal responsibilities.

Responding to Bullying

Bullying and other harmful behaviours vary in form, extent, impact and context. Each matter will be considered on its facts, and responses will be evidence-based, trauma-informed, relationship-focused, justifiable and tailored to the unique circumstances involved.

In all circumstances the College:

- takes all observed or reported bullying and other harmful behaviours seriously, whether or not the behaviour meets the formal definition of bullying
- makes reasonable efforts to initiate safety and support planning and communication within two school days of becoming aware of observed or reported bullying or other harmful behaviours, recognising that resolution may require additional time
- provides assurance to students experiencing harm that they are not at fault, explains confidentiality and privacy responsibilities, and provides appropriate safety and wellbeing support
- gathers and assesses information fairly, impartially and in a timely manner, including hearing from students who have been harmed, students engaging in harmful behaviour and relevant bystanders, while considering the perspectives and circumstances of those involved
- seeks to understand the concerns, needs, context and perspectives of individuals involved and considers relevant risk and protective factors
- keeps accurate, secure records outlining the steps taken under this policy and related procedures, including actions, supports, follow-up and escalation, while meeting privacy and confidentiality obligations
- provides clear and fair escalation pathways where interventions have not effectively resolved the matter or where risk increases, including for persistent, serious or severe harmful behaviour

Actions that may be taken when responding to bullying include:

- early communication with and, where appropriate, partnership with parents/carers, including communication of next steps and actions taken to the greatest extent possible while maintaining privacy and confidentiality responsibilities
- providing appropriate wellbeing, counselling, behaviour-change and/or other supports to students engaging in harmful behaviour, including support to understand the causes and impact of their behaviour and to end the cycle of harm
- providing appropriate wellbeing, counselling and other supports to students who have experienced harm, and to others affected by the incident, including bystanders where appropriate
- Restorative conferences and/or mediations
- proportionate disciplinary or other consequences, consistent with the Student Management Guidelines and relevant College policies, including escalation for serious or severe incidents where required

Staff Responsibilities

All members of the school workforce, including teaching and non-teaching staff, are responsible for:

- modelling safe, inclusive, respectful and appropriate behaviour at all times
- employing the principles and practices of Restorative Justice in dealing with behavioural issues and breaches
- responding to all observed or reported bullying and other harmful behaviours in accordance with this policy and related College procedures, and take reasonable steps to initiate an appropriate response within two school days of becoming aware of the behaviour
- ensuring that any bullying or other harmful behaviour they observe or that is reported to them is recorded appropriately, including on SEQTA or the designated College record-keeping system, in accordance with privacy and record-keeping requirements
- reporting incidents of cyber bullying to the eSafety Commissioner according to the Cyberbullying Scheme under the Online Safety Act 2021 (the Act)
- Take action in line with PROTECT and 4 Critical actions to identify and respond to Student-to-student abuse which may take many forms including physical or sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and emotional or psychological abuse, which may include bullying
- contacting the Police/Police Youth Liaison Officer if the bullying situation has involved violence, threat of harm or alleged criminal conduct
- monitoring students and others affected by bullying or harmful behaviour, implement agreed supports and follow-up, and report any persistence, escalation or increased risk
- acknowledging the right of parents/carers to raise concerns with the College and work in partnership with them when responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours

Procedures to Respond to a Report of Bullying

Step 1: Awareness and immediate risk assessment

- A staff member becomes aware of the behaviour and assesses immediate risk.
- If there is risk of immediate harm or danger, staff ensure safety by:
  - separating students involved
  - providing first aid if required
  - enacting the Emergency Management Plan
  - contacting Emergency Services (000), if needed.

Step 2: Preliminary assessment

- Relevant staff are informed, such as the House Leader, class teachers and supervising staff, to provide appropriate oversight and support.
- Determine whether the behaviour constitutes bullying.
- If not bullying, manage the behaviour under the Student Management Guidelines.
- The College will respond to harmful behaviour whether or not it meets the formal definition of bullying, with the nature and level of response proportionate to the behaviour, impact, risk and circumstances.

Step 3: Information gathering

- Collect statements from students, staff and witnesses and record on Learning Management System (See Student Management Guidelines)
- Records must be accurate, securely maintained and reflect the perspectives of those involved.

Step 4: Response

- Develop and implement a response:
  - prioritises immediate safety and wellbeing, including safety and support planning with student(s) experiencing bullying or other harm
  - supports student(s) engaging in bullying or other harmful behaviour to understand the cause and impact of their behaviour and to make sustained behaviour change
  - outlines agreed actions, supports and follow-up, which may include a Student Management Plan, Counselling Referral, Safety Plan, Restorative Meeting, Restorative session, suspension or other proportionate action
  - includes early and appropriate communication with parents/carers about safety actions, supports, next steps and actions taken, to the greatest extent possible while maintaining privacy and confidentiality responsibilities.
- Monitor the situation closely, review the effectiveness of supports and response actions, and adjust them where required.

Step 5: Monitor, review and escalate (where required)

- Maintain communication with students and parents/carers, communicate next steps and review outcomes, and adjust supports as required.
- Where the behaviour persists, risks increase or interventions have not effectively resolved the matter, implement additional supports and escalate through clear and fair pathways in accordance with the Student Management Guidelines.
- Where bullying or other harmful behaviour may constitute a criminal offence or otherwise require external reporting, the College will seek advice from Victoria Police, the eSafety Commissioner or other relevant authorities, as required.

Definitions

The College understands bullying as repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person that creates a risk to health and safety. Bullying can involve deliberate behaviour that causes fear, distress, harm, humiliation, intimidation, exclusion or damage to a person, their property, reputation or social acceptance, and may involve an imbalance of power. The College recognises that bullying sits within a broader continuum of harmful and negative interpersonal behaviours. A behaviour does not need to meet the formal definition of bullying before the College will take action to protect safety, wellbeing and inclusion.

Bullying and Other Harmful Behaviours Can Take Many Forms, including:	
Cyber-Bullying	The use of various forms of ICT systems to spread text and visual messages that threaten, intimidate, harass or humiliate a person or group of people.
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.
Gesture Bullying	Non-verbal signals used to silence and intimidate a victim.
Physical Bullying	Pushing, shoving, fighting, pinching and any other unwelcome physical contact used intentionally to intimidate or hurt someone.
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.
Social Bullying	Also called Relational, Emotional or Exclusion 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.

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.
Visual Bullying	Offensive notes or material, graffiti, or damaging other people's possessions.

Categories of Bullying

There are three broad categories of bullying:

Direct physical bullying	This form includes hitting, tripping, and pushing or damaging property.
Direct verbal bullying	This form includes name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse.
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 may not meet the formal definition of bullying, even though they are harmful, unpleasant or require intervention and management. The College will respond to all harmful behaviour appropriately and will not delay action while determining whether the behaviour meets the definition of bullying. Situations that may be confused with bullying include:

Mutual conflict	In mutual conflict situations, there is an argument or disagreement between students. Both parties may be upset and may seek resolution. Mutual conflict should still be addressed, monitored and supported because unresolved conflict can develop into repeated, one-sided harmful behaviour or bullying.
Single-episode acts	A single episode may not meet the formal definition of bullying, but it may still cause significant harm and requires an appropriate, timely and proportionate response. A single incident may also require escalation or further monitoring where risk is present or where subsequent behaviour indicates a pattern is developing.
Social rejection or dislike	Social rejection or dislike does not automatically constitute bullying. However, deliberate or repeated exclusion, humiliation, harassment or other harmful behaviour should be addressed, particularly where it creates a risk to safety, wellbeing or inclusion.

Related Policies and Procedures

- Student Management Guidelines
- Student Wellbeing Policy
- Student Digital Citizenship Policy
- Child Safe Policy
- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy
- National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools

POLICY HISTORY AND SCHEDULE	
Date of Approval:	October 2026
Approval Authority:	College Leadership Team
Delegated Contact Person:	Head of Students
Next Review Date:	October 2028