

Bullying Prevention Policy

29 April 2019



**VIRTUAL
SCHOOL VICTORIA**

Bullying Prevention Policy

Virtual School Victoria (VSV) provides flexible learning opportunities to a diverse and unique cohort of Victorian Foundation – Year 12 students. VSV fosters a safe, engaging and inclusive learning environment by coupling state of the art technology with innovative teaching practices. We provide both synchronous and asynchronous collaborative teaching and learning opportunities for students. The VSV core values: **Respect, Growth, Collaboration** and **Empathy** guide the behaviours of students, parents/carers, teachers and leaders as they interact with each other face to face, online and on the telephone.

VSV utilises the Health Promoting Schools framework to provide a whole school approach to student wellbeing and to ensure child safety practices are in accordance with Child Safe Schools guidelines. We are dedicated to building the confidence and resilience of every student. Our structures, policies and programs support the development of the students; academically, socially, emotionally and personally.

The VSV adopts a school wide approach consistent with Child Safe Standards in order to deal with bullying in a consistent and systematic way.

VSV acknowledges 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.

The Bullying Prevention Policy reflects our intention to actively promote a positive and welcoming environment for all members of the school community. The policy is made available to the entire VSV school community through our website and sits alongside the VSV Online Acceptable Use Policy. The school will provide resources to assist staff in responding appropriately to bullying, including cyber bullying issues. Bullying will be addressed, individual differences will be respected and students and staff will be supported in their pursuit of learning and teaching. All reports will be heard in confidence and taken seriously. VSV also encourages that where appropriate; responding to incidents of bullying may be a learning opportunity for the students involved. VSV acknowledges that many students may have experienced bullying prior to enrolment at VSV.

This policy addresses how VSV aims to prevent and respond to student bullying behaviour. VSV recognises 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 VSV policies (please see page 5 of this policy).

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Explain the definition of bullying
- Make clear that all forms of bullying at VSV will not be tolerated
- To ensure that everyone within the school community is aware of their responsibility to report signs and evidence of bullying
- Ensure that there is a clear and consistent process for all reported incidents of bullying; and that they are appropriately addressed
- Ensure that support is provided to students who may be affected by bullying behaviour
- Seek parental and peer group support in addressing and preventing bullying behaviour at VSV

Definitions

Bullying occurs when someone, or a group of people, deliberately and repeatedly upset, harass, intimidate, threaten or hurt another person or damage their property, reputation or social acceptance. There is an imbalance of power in incidents of bullying, where the bully or bullies have more power than the victim due to their age, size, status or other reasons. Bullying may be direct or indirect, physical or verbal, and includes cyberbullying. In this policy, any reference to 'bullying' includes all forms of bullying. Bullying is not a one-off disagreement between two or more people or a situation of mutual dislike.

Bullying can be:

1. **Direct physical bullying** – e.g. hitting, tripping, and pushing or damaging property.
2. **Direct verbal bullying** – e.g. name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks, verbal abuse.
3. **Indirect bullying** – this form of bullying is harder to recognise and often carried out behind the bullied student's back. E.g. spreading rumours, playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate, mimicking, encouraging others to socially exclude a person and/or damaging a person's social reputation or social acceptance.
4. **Cyber-bullying** - which involves the use of electronic means to humiliate and distress. **Cyberbullying** is direct or indirect bullying behaviours using digital technology. For example via a mobile phone, tablets, computers, chat rooms, email, social media, etc. It can be verbal, written or include use of images, video and/or audio. Consists of covert, psychological bullying, conveyed through the electronic mediums such as mobile phones, web-logs and websites, online chat rooms, 'MUD' rooms - multi-user domains, where individuals take on different characters; online personal profiles where some adolescents create lists of people they do not like. It can be verbal or written (trolling, flaming, threats, racial, sexual or homophobic harassment) using the various mediums available.

Learning spaces include: VSVOnline Courses, online lessons, live streaming both within the school and at events, VSV visits, school activities, including camps and excursions.

Harassment can also constitute bullying if it amounts to a pattern of behaviour or course of conduct towards another person that is demeaning, offensive or intimidating to a person. It includes any verbal, physical or sexual conduct (including gestures) which is uninvited, unwelcome or offensive to a person.

Other distressing behaviours

Many distressing behaviours may not constitute bullying even though they are unpleasant. Students who are involved in or who witness any distressing behaviours should report their concerns to school staff and our school will follow the guidance provided in **Safe and Inclusive Virtual Learning Environment Policy (in draft)**.

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 harassment, nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. If someone is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion, they are not being bullied. Harassment, nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different people is not the same as bullying. However, single episodes of harassment, nastiness or physical aggression are not acceptable behaviours at our school.

Bullying Prevention

VSV has a number of programs and strategies in place to build a positive and inclusive school culture. We strive to foster a school culture that prevents bullying behaviour by modelling and encouraging behaviour that demonstrates the VSV core values: Respect, Growth, Collaboration and Empathy.

Bullying prevention at VSV 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 have a positive school environment that provides safety, security and support for students and promotes positive relationships and wellbeing.
- 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 manage an inclusive classroom management that promote positive behaviours.
- In all learning spaces, 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 seek to empower students to be confident communicators and to resolve conflict in a non-aggressive and constructive way.
- We encourage attendance and participation in seminars, excursions, and online and collaborative activities.
- We encourage a balance of online learning and other extra-curricular pursuits.
- Students are encouraged to look out for each other and to talk to teachers, Learning Advisors, Student Coordinator's and Student Wellbeing about any bullying they have experienced or witnessed.

Incidence Response Reporting Concerns to VSV

Bullying complaints will be taken seriously and responded to sensitively at our school. 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 by VSV are timely and appropriate in the circumstances.

Students who may be experiencing bullying behaviour, or students who have witnessed bullying behaviour, are encouraged to report their concerns to school staff as soon as possible. In most circumstances, we encourage students to speak to their Learning Advisor, Subject Teacher or Student Coordinator. However, students are welcome to discuss their concerns with any trusted member of staff including teachers and wellbeing staff.

Observation or disclosure of a bullying incident can be made at any time to or by any VSV staff member, student or member of the community. The 'Report a Concern' icon embedded in *VSVOnline* student space provides an additional avenue for students to report concerns if they feel bullied or unsafe in any way.

Investigations

When notified of alleged bullying behaviour, school staff are required to:

1. The reporting teacher is to document in writing what they heard/witnessed and inform the relevant Student Coordinator via email, who will alert staff, which may include the relevant Learning Advisor, Head of School, Student Wellbeing Team Leader and Assistant Principal: Student Engagement & Wellbeing.
2. The relevant Student Coordinator is responsible for investigating allegations of bullying in a timely and sensitive manner, this also includes maintaining up to date records on the student database. If the incident is deemed to be of a serious and/or complex nature then the Head of School will support the Student Coordinator to appropriately investigate an allegation of bullying. This may include:

- speaking to the students involved in the incident, including any witnesses
- speaking to the parent/carer of the students involved (Student Coordinator and Learning Advisor to consider who is the most appropriate person to contact the student(s) and parent/carer)
- speaking to the Learning Advisor and teachers of the students involved
- taking detailed notes of all discussions for future reference
- obtaining written statements from all or any of the above where appropriate
- the Student Coordinator will guide response to the incident with all impacted students and their families
- appropriate action will be taken to ensure the safety of all students and to engage all those involved in the incident in finding a resolution to the matter
- the Student Wellbeing Team will be available should the impact of the incident require additional support {including linking the student to appropriate supports in their community}

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

There are a number of factors that will be considered when determining the most appropriate response to the behaviour. When making a decision about how to respond to bullying behaviour, VSV will consider:

- the age and maturity of the students involved
- consideration of the social and emotional development of the students involved
- the severity and frequency of the bullying, and the impact it has had on the student/s
- whether the student/s have displayed similar behaviour before
- whether the bullying took place in a group or one-to-one context
- whether the student/s demonstrates insight or remorse for their behaviour
- the reason for the behaviour, including any element of provocation

The Student Coordinator may implement all, or some of the following responses to bullying behaviours:

- Offer counselling support to affected students, including witnesses and/or friends of the student, which may include a referral to the Student Wellbeing Team.
- Facilitate communication and a shared concern between some or all of the students involved, to encourage students to take responsibility for their behaviour. This approach is only suitable if all students demonstrate a willingness to engage in this process.
- Implement consequences for the student/s where safety is of concern. This may include non-participation in learning spaces for an appropriate period of time. Students are still able to access their learning materials. The student will be supported to show a commitment and demonstration of the school values.
- In certain circumstances a Student Support Group* meeting and/or Behaviour Support Plan will be put in place for affected students.
- Provide discussion and/or mentoring for different social and emotional learning competencies of the students involved, including strategies to reinforce the VSV values.
- Monitor the behaviour of the students involved for an appropriate time and take follow up action if necessary.

*Student Support Group [Definition](#)

Further Information and Resources

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies:

- VSV statement of values
- VSV inclusive and respectful classroom behaviour policy (in draft)
- [VSV Online Terms of Use](#)
- [VSV Online Acceptable Use Policy](#)
- VSV [Student Wellbeing Policy](#)
- VSV [Child Safe Standards](#) Policy
- Parent Complaints policy
- Equal Opportunity Policy

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:

- [DET Bully Stoppers Guide](#)
- [Bullying. No way!](#)
- [Kids Helpline](#)
- [Lifeline](#)

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed on a 2 year basis, or earlier as required, following analysis of school data on reported incidents of, and responses to bullying to ensure that the policy remains up to date, practical and effective.

Data will be collected through:

- discussion with the school community
- the annual Student Attitude to School Survey
- assessment of school based data, including the number of reported incidents of bullying in each year group and the effectiveness of the responses implemented.

Proposed amendments to this policy will be discussed with the Assistant Principal: Student Engagement & Wellbeing. This could include consultation with the student representative groups, parent/carer groups, VSV Advisory Board.



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