Bullying Prevention Policy

December 2022

**VIRTUAL
SCHOOL VICTORIA**

Purpose

Virtual School Victoria (VSV) is committed to providing a safe and respectful learning environment where bullying will not be tolerated.

The purpose of this policy is to:
- explain the definition of bullying so that there is shared understanding amongst all members of the VSV community
- make clear that no form of bullying at VSV will be tolerated
- outline the strategies and programs in place at VSV 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 at VSV.

When responding to bullying behaviour, VSV aims to:
- be proportionate, consistent and responsive
- find a constructive solution for everyone
- stop the bullying from happening again
- restore the relationships between the students involved.

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.

Scope

This policy addresses how VSV aims to prevent, address 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 Student Wellbeing, Inclusion and Engagement Policy and our Safe and Inclusive Virtual Learning Policy.

This policy applies to all school activities, including camps and excursions. It also applies to bullying behaviour between students that occurs outside of school hours, where the behaviour impacts on student wellbeing and safety at school.

Policy

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.

Learning spaces include: *VSV Online* courses, online classes, live streaming both within the school and at events, school visits, school activities, including camps, excursions and any extra-curricular activities such as student clubs.

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.

For further information about bullying, refer to: Bully Stoppers (education.vic.gov.au) and the Department's Bullying Prevention and Response policy on the Policy and Advisory Library.

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 the Student Wellbeing, Engagement and Inclusion Policy 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. VSV will use its Student Wellbeing Policy, Student Engagement Policy, Student Inclusion Policy and Safe and Inclusive Virtual Learning Policy to guide a response to single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression.

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. It can be online or in real life.

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).

Discrimination, harassment, and any other inappropriate behaviour is not tolerated at our school and there may be serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour. This includes any form of racism, religious or disability discrimination, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or any other behaviour that targets an individual or group. Further information about discrimination and harassment, including definitions, is set out in our *Student Inclusion Policy*.

Bullying Prevention

VSV has a number of programs and strategies in place to build a positive and inclusive school culture and relationships to promote wellbeing. We strive to foster a school culture that prevents bullying behaviour by modelling, encouraging and teaching behaviour that demonstrates acceptance, kindness and 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 encourage attendance and participation in seminars, excursions, and online and collaborative activities. We encourage a balance of online learning and other extra-curricular pursuits.
- We identify and implement evidence-based programs and initiatives from the Schools Mental Health Menu that are relevant to preventing and addressing bullying and help us to build a positive and inclusive school climate.
- 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.
- We participate in the Respectful Relationships initiative, which aims to embed a culture of respect and equality across our school.
- We celebrate the diverse backgrounds of members of our school community and teach multicultural education, including Aboriginal history, to promote mutual respect and social cohesion.
- We participate in the Safe Schools program to help us foster a safe environment that is supportive and inclusive of LGBTIQ+ students.
- Teachers are encouraged to incorporate classroom management strategies that discourage bullying and promote positive behaviour.
- A range of year level incursions and programs are planned for each year to raise awareness about bullying and its impacts.
- 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 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. Students are encouraged to alert any concerns through the 'Report a concern' function in VSV Online and through direct communication to teachers, Learning Advisors or Wellbeing team members.
- We seek to empower students to be confident communicators and to resolve conflict in a non-aggressive and constructive way.
- Students are encouraged to look out for each other and to talk to peers, teachers, Learning Advisors, Student Coordinators, Wellbeing team members or Principal Class about any bullying they have experienced or witnessed.
- We participate in the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence, are working to attain eSmart accreditation, and provide ongoing synchronous online classes training.

For further information about our engagement and wellbeing processes, please see our Student Wellbeing, Inclusion and Engagement Policy.

Incident Response
Reporting concerns to Virtual School Victoria

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 by VSV are timely and appropriate in the 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 Learning Advisors, Student Coordinators, Wellbeing team members or Principal Class

Parents or carers who develop concerns that their child is involved in, or has witnessed bullying behaviour at VSV should contact their child's Learning Advisor, subject teacher or Student Coordinator by phone on 03 8480 0000 or by email.

Investigations

When notified of alleged bullying behaviour, school staff are required to notify the relevant Student Coordinator who 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 Primary Leader, Middle Years Leader or Head of Senior School will support the Student Coordinator to appropriately investigate an allegation of bullying.

This may include:
- Speaking to those involved in the allegations, including the target/s, the students allegedly engaging in bullying behaviour/s and any witnesses to the incident/s.
- Speaking to the parent/carer(s) 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 subject teacher and/or Learning Advisor of the students involved.
- Taking detailed notes of all discussions for future reference.
- Obtaining written statements from all or any of the above.
- The Student Coordinator will guide response to the incident with all impacted students and their families.
- Communication will be made with supporting practitioners where appropriate to seek advice or to alert them to the circumstances.
- 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}.

All communications with the Student Coordinator in the course of investigating an allegation of bullying will be managed sensitively. Investigations will be completed as quickly as possible to allow for the behaviours to be addressed in a timely manner. All records of the incident and subsequent management will be managed in a manner consistent with privacy and confidentiality guidelines.

The objective of completing a thorough investigation into the circumstances of alleged bullying behaviour is to determine the nature of the conduct and the students involved. A thorough understanding of the alleged bullying will inform staff about how to most effectively implement an appropriate response to that behaviour.

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

When the Student Coordinator has sufficient information to understand the circumstances of the alleged bullying and the students involved, a number of strategies may be implemented to address the behaviour and support affected students in consultation with the Student Wellbeing team, Assistant Principal: Student Engagement & Wellbeing or Principal.

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, maturity, social/emotional development and individual circumstances of the students involved
- the severity and frequency of the bullying, and the impact it has had on the target student/s
- 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.

The Student Coordinator may implement all, or some of the following responses to bullying behaviours, in accordance with the Safe and Inclusive Virtual Learning at VSV protocols:
- Offer wellbeing support, including a referral to the Student Wellbeing team, to:
  - the target student or students
  - the students engaging in the bullying behaviour
  - affected students, including witnesses and/or friends of the target student.
- Facilitate a restorative practice meeting with all or some of the students 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.
- Facilitate a mediation between some or all of the students involved to help to encourage students to take responsibility for their behaviour and explore underlying reasons for conflict or grievance. Mediation is only suitable if all students are involved voluntarily and demonstrate a willingness to engage in the mediation 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.
- Implement a Method of Shared Concern process with all students involved in the bullying.
- Prepare a Safety Plan or Individual Management Plan restricting contact between target and students engaging in bullying behaviour.
- Monitor the behaviour of the students involved for an appropriate time and take follow up action if necessary.

- Implement proportionate disciplinary consequences for the students engaging in bullying behaviour, which may include removal of privileges, detention, suspension and/or expulsion consistent with our Student Wellbeing, Engagement and Inclusion policy, the Ministerial Order on Suspensions and Expulsions and any other relevant Department policy.
- Provide discussion and/or mentoring for different social and emotional learning competencies of the students involved, including strategies to reinforce VSV values.

VSV 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.

The Student Coordinator is responsible for maintaining up to date records of the investigation of and responses to bullying behaviour.

Communication

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:
- Available publicly on our school's website.
- Promoted through parent newsletters and student communication.
- Included in staff induction processes.
- Included in the Learner Advisor Teachers Manual.
- Discussed at staff meetings as required.

Further information and resources

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following:
- Statement of Values and School Philosophy
- Safe and Inclusive Virtual Learning Policy
- Student Wellbeing, Inclusion and Engagement Policy
- Complaints Policy

Our school also follows Department of Education and Training policy relating to bullying including:
- Bullying Prevention and Response
- Cybersafety and Responsible Use of Digital Technologies
- Equal Opportunity and Human Rights - Students
- LGBTIQ Student Support 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:
- Bully Stoppers
- Report racism or religious discrimination in schools
- Kids Helpline
- ReachOut Australia
- Lifeline
- Bullying. No way!
- Student Wellbeing Hub
- eSafety Commissioner
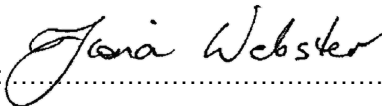- Australian Student Wellbeing Framework

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years, or earlier as required following an incident or analysis of new research relating to bullying, to ensure that the policy remains up to date, practical and effective. VSV is developing a centralised incident reporting system to collect and collate school data for recording and responding to bullying incidents.

Data to inform this review will be collected through:
- discussion and consultation with students and parent/carers with School Council approval
- Attitudes to School Survey
- Parent/Caregiver/Guardian Opinion Survey
- Staff Surveys

Proposed amendments to this policy will be discussed with School Council and the Child Safety Team.

Policy review and approval

Created date	**December 2022**
Consultation	School Council – Date: 18th October 2022 – 13th December 2022 School Community – Date: 18th October 2022 – 28th October 2022
Endorsed by	**Fiona Webster** Executive Principal Signature:…………………………………………
Endorsed on	**Date**: 13th December 2022
Next review date	**December 2024**