

Anti-bullying policy for students

A policy document for use by schools in conjunction
with the Catholic Education Office Anti-Bullying website

www.parra.catholic.edu.au/bullying



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Contact Person	Senior Professional Officer, Policy, Planning and Equity, Catholic Education Office. Phone: 9840 5600
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Distribution	Systemic Catholic schools, Diocese of Parramatta

Related system policies, documents and procedures

- *Procedures to be followed in the Suspension and Expulsion of Students from Catholic Schools* (1996; in revision, 2005)
- *Anti-racism Policy Statement and Support Materials* (1998)
- *Managing a Safe School Environment – Legislative Changes* (2003)
- *Maintaining Right Relations* (2003)
- *Protective Practices for School Staff in their Relationships with Students* (2004)
- *Child Protection Kit* (2004)
- *Approaches to Student Management-A System Framework* (working draft, 2005)
- *Anti-Bullying website* (2005) (www.parra.catholic.edu.au/bullying)

1. Introduction

The Catholic education system in the Diocese of Parramatta is committed to developing an educational and organisational culture based on mutual trust and respect that assists people to recognise and develop their personal capabilities.

Any type of bullying in Catholic schools is contrary to Gospel values and the system's *Vision Statement: Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Parramatta (1999)*. These values and principles are outlined in the following statements:

To be inviting, inclusive and just is to ensure that we work to promote the common good in our schools, the system as a whole, and the wider society.

We will be inviting, inclusive and just by:

- embracing the diversity of people and cultures
- promoting collaborative practice
- encouraging staff to strive for growth
- providing staff with access to appropriate, growth-promoting development opportunities

All children and young people have a right to an education that is free from discrimination, harassment and bullying. Students who are the targets of persistent bullying can suffer long-term psychological, social and developmental damage that can continue into their adult years.

Violence, bullying and harassment affect everyone, not just the targets of bullies and the perpetrators themselves. It also affects those who witness the violence and aggression that is often associated with bullying and the distress and powerlessness of the victim or victims. Bullying behaviours can have a profound long-term effect on the culture of a school.

Staff in the Catholic education system in the Diocese of Parramatta are committed to developing and implementing policies, procedures and practices that protect students from bullying behaviours and creating educational communities that are proactive in the promotion of positive behaviours by all students.

This policy document is linked to the system's *Maintaining Right Relations (2003)* policy.

2. Definition

Bullying is repeated psychological or physical oppression of a less powerful person or group of persons by a more powerful person or group of persons (Rigby, 1996) that creates a risk to mental and physical health and safety. Bullying is ongoing in nature and the bully is encouraged by another's pain, distress, fear and humiliation.

Bullying may manifest itself in the form of emotional, social, verbal and/or physical incidents, all of which will cause distress. Examples of bullying include:

Physical: hitting; pushing; tripping; kicking; spitting on others

Verbal: teasing; using offensive names; yelling or screaming abuse; constant criticism of a person; inappropriate comments about a person's appearance

- Non-verbal: writing offensive notes, in any medium; graffiti about others; rude gestures
- Psychological: spreading rumours; hiding or damaging possessions; inappropriate use of information technologies, such as using email, websites or text messaging to hurt others; using the internet or mobile phones to spread rumours or misinformation; unauthorised use of camera phones to cause harm to others
- Social-
- Emotional: deliberately excluding others from a group; refusing to sit next to someone; overtly encouraging other people to actively ignore or avoid a person
- Extortion: threatening to take someone's possession, food or money
- Property: stealing, hiding, damaging or destroying property

3. The impact of bullying

Bullying behaviour stops an individual from feeling comfortable in a school's shared environment. Bullying behaviour can also adversely affect the long-term emotional and social development of the bully. Bullying impacts on the school community as a whole.

Individual students who are bullied may:

- begin to feel worthless and develop poor self-esteem and self-worth
- experience feelings of isolation and distress in the school environment
- feel scared and anxious about their personal safety
- develop emotional and/or psychological problems
- develop long-term problems in establishing friendships and social connections with their peers
- develop learning and academic delay or difficulties
- become angry and resentful as a result of their ongoing distress and social isolation

A bullying culture in a school may result in:

- the development of a school atmosphere of distrust and fear
- an increase in the number and severity of violent and aggressive acts by students
- the development of a frustrated and resentful parent community
- an increase in feelings of powerlessness by significant numbers of students, teachers and parents

4. School responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the school principal to ensure specific policies, procedures and curriculum measures are established and implemented in the school to develop and maintain a culture of care in which bullying behaviour is not accepted under any circumstances.

Bullying in the school environment also has legal ramifications for principals, teachers, students and parents. School authorities have a duty of care towards students and staff and that means taking all reasonable measures to ensure that the school is a safe place for students and staff.

Apart from the common law duty of care, there exists a general framework of State and Commonwealth civil legislation that applies to bullying. As a result, the school authority is responsible for ensuring that schools are safe learning and work environments for students and staff, free from victimisation, harassment, unlawful discrimination, vilification, abuse or any other threats to the health and safety of the school's occupants.

Procedures to manage any incidents that may arise from bullying are also the responsibility of the principal and school staff and need to be addressed in specific school protocols. The principal should ensure that the school community is made aware of these policies and procedures.

It is the responsibility of the Catholic Education Office to provide appropriate system support and direction to school principals and staff so that they can establish safe and protective school environments for all students.

4.1 Preventative strategies

In schools and educational settings those responsible will work towards preventing bullying through a range of strategies that may include:

- the development and monitoring of the school culture to ensure it is based on mutual trust and respect
- the development and implementation of specific policies and procedures that are appropriate to the developmental stages of students
- the provision of specific educational programs and resources
- training programs and professional development for members of the school community
- regular monitoring and evaluation of the school's anti-bullying policies and procedures
- school-based activities where the value of the individual is affirmed and personal qualities such as compassion, kindness, respect and tolerance are fostered and modelled by staff and students
- opportunities for cross-school student leadership and involvement, such as peer support and student representative processes
- the promotion and implementation of values-based curriculum options

- the provision of PD/H/PE syllabus coverage to ensure the teaching of all essential 'learn about' and 'learn to' units of work that may relate to bullying behaviours
- school-based programs and activities that promote the skills of communicating, decision-making, interacting, planning and problem-solving for students

4.2 Addressing specific instances of bullying

Schools will have established policy and procedure documentation about managing bullying incidents. These will be published and promoted within the school community.

Policy and procedure documentation about bullying incidents should include:

- the school's procedures for dealing with bullying behaviour
- the timeframe for responding to instances of bullying
- the staff responsible for the various stages of the school's response to bullying

Should an instance of specific bullying occur, schools will implement their procedures in a timely manner.

4.3 School documentation

Documentation gathered in the school's response to specific instances of bullying will indicate:

- what was allegedly said and done to the complainant
- the date, time and the place when the incident(s) occurred
- any witnesses to the incident
- the reaction (if any) of the complainant
- whether the complainant had experienced that treatment before (if yes, a staff member should establish if it was from the same student or students)
- notification of the incident to the parents of those students involved in the incident
- follow-up action, in conjunction with the relevant staff member and student

4.4 Follow-up action by the school

Follow-up action by schools will ensure:

- resolution of the problem in an amicable and impartial manner
- advice to the complainants that they may take the matter further if they are not satisfied with the way that the school handled their complaint
- monitoring of the situation
- appropriate feedback to parents of students involved

4.5 More serious matters

- Persistent incidents of bullying that interfere with the safety and well-being of other students need to be reviewed in the context of other relevant diocesan student welfare policies, and appropriate action taken.
- The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 places a mandatory obligation on principals, or their delegates, teachers and other staff to make a report to the Department of Community Services if current concerns exist for the safety of a child or a young person.

4.6 Procedural fairness

Schools will ensure that procedural fairness applies in dealing with any incidents of bullying. Appropriate and timely support, management and resolution of reported incidents of bullying will be offered to all persons involved in these incidents.

4.7 A checklist for schools

The following checklist may be helpful for schools when establishing and implementing measures to deal with bullying behaviour:

- the school has established and promoted procedures to deal with bullying behaviours
- staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to responding to incidents of bullying
- the school provides regular professional development for all staff members and students about the implications of bullying
- the school maintains confidentiality when dealing with complaints of bullying behaviour
- parents of students involved in bullying incidents are given appropriate feedback
- the school has implemented procedures for the reporting and documentation of instances of bullying
- the school has in place procedures for monitoring and evaluating its range of responses for dealing with bullying behaviour
- the procedures for dealing with bullying behaviour are consistent and compatible with other student management and welfare policies and procedures
- the school has developed a restorative and rehabilitation plan for both the perpetrator(s) and victim(s) of bullying behaviour

5. What parents can do

Schools in the Diocese of Parramatta will work to maintain ongoing partnerships with parents and parishes in the prevention and appropriate response to bullying behaviours.

Parents can refer to the Catholic Education Office's Anti-Bullying website for specific strategies in dealing with bullying behaviours.

Parents can also:

- communicate any concerns about bullying with the school
- let their child know that bullying in any form is never acceptable
- help their child develop skills to appropriately deal with bullying
- develop their child's self-esteem about other aspects of their life

6. Further options

In instances when parents feel that the school is not addressing their concerns in an appropriate and timely manner, they may wish to seek the assistance of the Area Administrator responsible for the school. Area Administrators can be contacted at the Catholic Education Office.

7. Catholic Education Office support

The Catholic Education Office will support schools in implementing this policy by:

- ensuring all staff, students and parents have access to a copy of this policy and other relevant resources
- providing a website and other resources, accessible to all members of the school community, focusing on different aspects of bullying
- supporting individual schools in developing their own procedures and strategies in addressing bullying

Signed:

Dr Anne Benjamin
Executive Director of Schools
Diocese of Parramatta