Bullying Prevention Policy



Help for non-English speakers Interpreting and Translation Services.

If you need help to understand the information in this policy, please contact Whittlesea Secondary College General Office Ph. (03) 9719-1200.

Purpose:

Whittlesea Secondary College 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 a shared understanding amongst all members of the Whittlesea Secondary College community
- Make clear that no form of **bullying** at Whittlesea Secondary College will not be tolerated
- Outline the Strategies and programs in place at Whittlesea Secondary College to build a positive college culture and prevent **bullying behaviour**
- Ask that everyone in our College community be alert to signs and evidence of **bullying behaviour**, and accept responsibility to report **bullying behaviour** to College 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 Whittlesea Secondary College.

When responding to **bullying behaviour**, Whittlesea Secondary College aims to:

- Be proportionate, consistent and responsive
- Find a constructive and positive solution for everyone
- Stop the **bullying** from happening again
- Restore the relationships between the students involved
- Address the impacts of **bullying**

Whittlesea Secondary College acknowledges that College 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 Whittlesea Secondary College aims to prevent and respond to student bullying behaviour. Whittlesea Secondary College 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 College. These other inappropriate behaviours will be managed in accordance with our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy, and our Student Code of Conduct Policy and our Inclusion and Diversity Policy.

This policy applies to all College 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 our College.

Definitions:

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.**

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.

Policy:

This policy supports Whittlesea Secondary College's compliance with the Victorian Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order No. 1359.

There are 4 main types of Bullying Behaviour:

- **Physical** –includes face-to-face interactions that may involve physical harm or damaging or stealing belongings.
- **Verbal/written** – includes threats or name-calling or insulting someone.
- **Social** – includes exclusion, spreading rumours and sharing of information that could cause harm.
- **Online harm** – involves using technology to harm, including creating or sharing harmful information.

Bullying may be direct or indirect, physical or verbal, and includes cyberbullying. Bullying is not a one-off disagreement between two or more people or a situation of mutual dislike. In this policy any reference to 'bullying' includes all forms of bullying including cyberbullying.

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) 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 College staff and our College will follow our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy, Student Code of Conduct Policy , Inclusion and Diversity 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 College and may have serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour.

Whittlesea Secondary College will use its Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy and Student Code of Conduct 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.

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 Whittlesea Secondary College 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 Inclusion and Diversity Policy.

Bullying Prevention

Whittlesea Secondary College has several programs and strategies in place to build a positive and inclusive school culture and relationships to promote wellbeing. We strive to foster a College culture that prevents bullying behaviour by modelling, encouraging and teaching behaviour that demonstrates acceptance, kindness and respect. Bullying prevention at Whittlesea 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 College:

- 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 College climate.
- We strive to create a positive College environment that provides safety, security and support for students and promotes positive relationships and wellbeing.
- We strive to build strong partnerships between the College, families and the broader community that means all members work together to ensure the safety of students.
- We celebrate the diverse backgrounds of members of our College 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 LGBTIQA+ 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 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.
- The Peer Support program and the Peer Mediation program encourage positive relationships between students in different year levels. 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 teachers and older peers about any bullying they have experienced or witnessed.
- We participate in the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence.
- We seek to empower students to be confident communicators and to resolve conflict in a non-aggressive and constructive way.
- We participate in the Respectful Relationships initiative, which aims to embed a culture of respect and equality across our College.
- The Student Voice and Agency team encourage positive relationships between students in different year levels, as well as the Student Representative Council. We seek to empower students to be confident communicators and to resolve conflict in a non-aggressive and constructive way.
- 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 look out for each other and to talk to teachers and older peers about any bullying they have experienced or witnessed.

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

Bullying/Incident Response:

Reporting concerns to Whittlesea Secondary College

Bullying is not tolerated at our College. 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 College staff or another trusted adult as soon as possible.

When reporting concerns to Whittlesea Secondary College bullying complaints/allegations will be taken seriously and responded to sensitively at our College.

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 Whittlesea Secondary College are timely and appropriate in the circumstances. The response will be initiated within 2 school days of becoming aware of the bullying behaviour, recognising further time may be required to fully understand and address the issue.

In most circumstances, we encourage students to their Student Manager, Leading Teachers, Wellbeing Team members, or any trusted member of College leadership. However, students are welcome to discuss their concerns with any trusted member of College staff.

Parents or carers who develop concerns that their child is involved in or has witnessed bullying behaviour at Whittlesea Secondary College should contact the **Assistant Principal for Engagement and Wellbeing** , by phone on Ph. (03) 9719 1200 or by email on Whittlesea.sc@education.vic.gov.au.

Investigations:

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

1. Ask the student/s to write a statement with details of the incident.
2. Record the details of the allegations in Whittlesea Secondary College incident register and COMPASS.
3. Inform the students Student Manager and/or Wellbeing Team if necessary. The Student Manager is responsible for investigating allegations of bullying in a timely and sensitive manner.
4. Wellbeing/Student Managers/Leading Teachers/Assistant Principal for Wellbeing and Engagement are required to log the incident on COMPASS, student file and in our Child Safe Incident Register.

The **Student Manager** is responsible for investigating allegations of bullying in a timely and sensitive manner. To appropriately investigate an allegation of bullying, the **Student Manager** may:

- Speak 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
- Speak to the parent/carer(s) of the students involved
- Speak to the teachers of the students involved
- Take detailed notes of all discussions for future reference
- Obtain written statements from all or any of the above.

All communications with the Student Manager and Assistant Principal of Engagement and Wellbeing in the course of investigating an allegation of bullying will be managed sensitively. Information will be handled sensitively and confidentially, except where disclosure is required to protect student safety or fulfil legal obligations.

Investigations will be completed as quickly as possible to allow for the behaviours to be addressed in a timely manner. The only staff members that have access to the Child Safety Incident Register is the Principal Team and Wellbeing Team.

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 College 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.

Some bullying behaviour can also be abuse. If you believe the behaviour towards another student is abuse, follow the 4 Critical Actions - student to student abuse.

Responses to bullying behaviours

When the **Student Manager/Leading Teacher/Assistant Principal of Engagement** and Wellbeing has sufficient information to understand the circumstances of the alleged bullying and the students involved, several strategies may be implemented to address the behaviour and support affected students in consultation with the Principal Team, Leadership Team, Teachers and Wellbeing Student Support Services.

There are several factors that will be considered when determining the most appropriate response to the behaviour. When deciding about how to respond to bullying behaviour, Whittlesea Secondary College will consider:

- 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 the behaviour
- the alleged motive of the behaviour.

The **Student Manager/ Assistant Principal of Engagement and Wellbeing** may implement all, or some of the following responses to bullying behaviours:

- Offer wellbeing support, including referral to The 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 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.
- Facilitate a process using the Support Group Method, involving the target student(s), the students engaging in bullying behaviour and a group of students who are likely to be supportive of the target(s).
- Implement a Method of Shared Concern process with all students involved in the bullying.
- Facilitate a Student Support Group meeting and/or Behaviour Support Plan for affected students.
- Prepare a Safety Plan and/or Individual Management Plan restricting contact between target and students engaging in bullying behaviour.
- Provide discussion and/or mentoring for different social and emotional learning competencies of the students involved.
- Monitor the behaviour of the students involved for an appropriate time and take follow up action if necessary.
- Implement cohort, year group, or whole school targeted strategies to reinforce positive behaviours.
- 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 and Engagement Policy, the Ministerial Order on suspensions and expulsions and any other relevant department policy.

Whittlesea 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.

The Student Manager/Assistant Principal of Engagement and Wellbeing is responsible for maintaining up to date records of the investigation of and responses to bullying behaviour. **The Assistant Principal of Engagement and Wellbeing is responsible for updating and monitoring the Child Safety register and track instances of bullying and any potential trends.**

Communication:

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

- Included in staff induction processes and staff training
- Available publicly on our College website and/or via COMPASS
- Included in staff handbook/manual
- Discussed at staff briefings/meetings
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
- Discussed at student forums/through communication tools
- Hard copy available from College administration upon request

Further Information and Resources:

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following Whittlesea Secondary College policies:

- School Values and School Philosophy
- Communication with staff policy
- Complaints Policy
- Inclusion and Diversity Policy
- Duty of care Policy
- Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy

Our College also follows Department of Education policy relating to bullying including:

- Bullying Prevention and Response
- Digital Technologies – Responsible Use
- Equal Opportunity and Human Rights - Students
- LGBTIQA+ Student Support
- Preventing and Addressing Racism in Schools

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
- Schools Mental Health Menu

Evaluation:

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

Data to inform this review is collected through:

- discussion and consultation with students and parent/carers
- regular student, staff and parent/carer surveys
- 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
- Attitudes to School Survey
- Parent Opinion Survey

Proposed amendments to this policy will be discussed with student representative groups, parents groups, school council. Parent and Student Bullying surveys will be emailed out.

Policy Review and Approval:

Policy last reviewed	**October 2026**
Consultation	School Council, SRC, College Leadership. Principal Executive.
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	**October 2028**