Melbourne Archdiocese
Catholic Schools

# Student Bullying Prevention and Response Policy for MACS Schools

## 1. Introduction

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd (**MACS**) is a company limited by guarantee established in 2021 by the Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne to assume the governance and operation of MACS schools across the Archdiocese of Melbourne. MACS subsequently established Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Specialist Schools Ltd (**MACSS**) to provide educational services to children with diverse needs and Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Early Years Education (**MACSEYE**) to provide early years care and education services.

The Statement of Mission in the MACS Constitution, and the constitutions of its subsidiaries, MACSS and MACSEYE, sets out the Archbishop's expectations of Catholic schooling in the Archdiocese and provides an important context and grounding for the company and the direction which the MACS Board must always observe in the pursuit of the company's objects.

The Board must ensure that all policies and procedures concerning the operations of MACS, and its subsidiaries are consistent with the Statement of Mission and company objects, as well as any directions issued by the Archbishop from time to time.

## 2. Background

Principals and all staff in MACS schools have a duty of care to take reasonable and proactive steps to protect students from foreseeable harm, both in physical and online environments. This includes implementing measures to prevent physical or psychological harm resulting from any form of bullying, including cyberbullying and other harmful behaviours.

This policy is informed by the *National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools*, which emphasises a whole-school, evidence-based approach to prevention, early intervention and response, underpinned by clear processes, timely action, inclusive practices and ongoing support for students and staff.

This policy is an element of the PROTECT policy suite and supports the guidance for identifying and responding to student-to-student abuse in schools.

## 3. Purpose

This policy outlines MACS' commitment to preventing and responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours, in order to ensure safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments for all students.

It also ensures that schools meet MACS' requirements to document and implement consistent approaches to preventing and responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours.

## 4. Scope

This policy applies to MACS schools, including specialist schools operated by MACS subsidiary, MACSS, and school boarding premises operated by MACS schools.

This policy applies to all students; staff including volunteers, contractors and casual relief teachers (CRT), parents and carers and members of the school community.

This policy applies to the following physical and digital environments:

- at school and while travelling to and from school
- at school activities and events, including functions and sporting events
- when students are representing the school, whether they are in uniform or not
- when students can be identified as members of the school community

- outside school hours or online, where the behaviour poses a significant risk to a student, staff member or the school community.

The principal holds overall responsibility for leading, monitoring and responding to the *Student Bullying Prevention and Response Policy*, and for ensuring that all processes outlined in the associated procedures are fully implemented. While specific tasks may be assigned to other staff, the principal retains accountability for compliance with, and delivery of, all policy requirements.

# 5. Statement of commitment

MACS does not tolerate bullying or other harmful behaviours. MACS schools are committed to taking timely, consistent and appropriate actions to prevent, identify and respond to bullying, while safeguarding the rights of all students.

All incidents of bullying, including perceived or actual incidents of harassment and cyberbullying, are responded to sensitively, fairly and promptly.

# 6. Principles

The following principles underpin this policy:

- Every student is inspired and enabled to flourish and enrich the world (MACS 2030).
- MACS school communities exemplify the Gospel values of love, forgiveness, justice and truth.
- Each school community recognises that everyone has the right to be respected and to feel and be safe, understands their rights, and acknowledges their obligation to behave responsibly.
- A whole-school approach is implemented to prevent and address bullying, with school leadership driving and embedding expectations through education and awareness initiatives.
- Early intervention is prioritised to prevent escalation. Responses are trauma-informed, relationship-focused and tailored to the specific circumstances.
- The diverse needs of students, including those at increased risk of bullying, are recognised and addressed through inclusive and culturally responsive practices.
- Ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review of bullying prevention and response practices are undertaken to support continuous improvement.

# 7. Prevention

Schools commit to implementing a whole-school approach to prioritising the prevention of bullying and other harmful behaviours by:

- identifying and addressing risk factors that may contribute to bullying and other harmful behaviours
- teaching respectful behaviour to ensure bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted
- explicitly teaching knowledge, skills and dispositions that prevent and respond to bullying and other harmful behaviours through developmentally sequenced learning across the Victorian Curriculum F–10, including Personal and Social Capability, Health and Physical Education and Respectful Relationships education
- providing age-appropriate, culturally responsive and inclusive instruction that teaches students to recognise and understand bullying, cyberbullying and other harmful behaviours; understand their impact on individuals and communities; apply strategies to prevent, respond to and seek help; and act safely and responsibly in physical and online environments
- implementing education and awareness strategies to support evidence-based and trauma-informed prevention practices
- considering and addressing the unique needs of the local school context, including diverse student groups
- providing opportunities for the school community to actively contribute to anti-bullying initiatives

- engaging students, staff, parents and carers in building and maintaining a positive and inclusive school culture through modelling expected behaviours.

# 8. Reporting

## 8.1 Bullying

Schools ensure that:

- incidents of bullying and other harmful behaviours can be reported by students, staff, parents and carers
- reporting processes, including fair escalation pathways, where interventions have not effectively resolved an incident, are clearly communicated and readily accessible
- all reports are taken seriously, responded to in a timely manner and appropriately documented.

## 8.2 PROTECT: Child abuse identification and response

Schools implement the *Child Abuse Identification and Response Policy* alongside this policy and follow the Victorian Government's 4 Critical Actions to identify and respond to child abuse.

Student-to-student abuse can take many forms including physical or sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and emotional or psychological abuse, which may include bullying.

# 9. Response

Schools ensure that appropriate and timely action is taken and that students' right to education and safe and respectful learning environments is upheld by:

- making 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
- ensuring all responses are evidence-based, trauma-informed, relationship-focused, justified and tailored to the specific circumstances
- prioritising the immediate safety and wellbeing of those involved
- partnering with parents and carers when responding to incidents of bullying and other harmful behaviours
- investigating incidents of bullying and other harmful behaviours in a fair, timely and impartial manner
- implementing appropriate actions that may include restorative, educational or disciplinary responses
- providing support to all students involved, including those harmed, those engaged in bullying and other harmful behaviours, and any bystanders
- consistently managing processes for repeated incidents of bullying
- clearly and appropriately communicating actions while maintaining privacy obligations.

# 10. Staff support

Schools ensure that all staff are empowered and equipped to prevent and respond effectively to bullying and other harmful behaviours, while fostering a positive and safe learning environment by:

- providing appropriate wellbeing and support services for affected students
- supporting students to understand the causes and impacts of their behaviour, and take responsibility for positive change, with a view to ending the cycle
- ensuring staff have access to trauma-informed professional learning and development
- building staff capacity to recognise risk and protective factors and implement appropriate prevention, early intervention and response actions

- ensuring staff can access wellbeing and professional support when impacted by, or responding to, bullying or other harmful behaviours.

## 11. Communication

Schools actively integrate this policy into the culture of the school and communicate it to the school community through:

- staff induction programs and staff handbooks
- regular reinforcement of expectations with staff
- inclusion of the policy in enrolment materials and/or student diaries
- publication of the policy on the school's website, with accessible formats made available upon request.

## 12. Review

This policy is reviewed at least every two years and after any significant incident to ensure it remains effective. Principals are required to review school strategies and procedures at least every two years and after any significant incident. School communities are informed when this policy is reviewed and updated.

MACS is committed to continuous improvement through data collection, analysis, evaluation and research, ensuring that bullying prevention and response approaches remain targeted, effective and responsive to emerging issues.

## 13. Records management

Schools ensure all reports of bullying are securely maintained in accordance with *Ministerial Order 1359 – Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the risk of child abuse in schools,* the *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy* and *Child Safety and Wellbeing Recordkeeping Procedures*.

## 14. Roles and reporting responsibilities

| Role | Responsibility | Reporting requirement |
|---|---|---|
| Principal | Ensure all policies for the care, safety and welfare of students are publicly available | Annual attestation to the Executive Director |
| Principal | Retain all reports of incidents, perceived or actual, of bullying in the school in accordance with the *Child Safety and Wellbeing Recordkeeping Procedures* | |
| Principal | Report the following incidents via MACS Guard:<br>• non-routine or serious injuries and illnesses (physical and psychological) requiring treatment by a medical professional<br>• significant and/or repeated student behavioural incidents where wellbeing or safety was at risk<br>• aggressive behaviour or physical threats involving students, parents or the public | |
| Principal and school leaders | Implement whole-school approaches and measures to educate and inform the school community to help prevent and respond to all forms of bullying | |
| School leaders (principals, deputy principals) | Coordinate targeted support for students whose behaviour indicates emerging or persistent needs | Submit all Student Engagement Unit consultation requests and |

| Role | Responsibility | Reporting requirement |
|---|---|---|
| | | maintain case notes via the ROSAE application on CEVN |
| School staff (all) and volunteers | Understand and apply school processes to ensure consistent application and adherence to policy and procedures | |

# 15. Procedures

Principals are to document their school's procedures for prevention of all forms of bullying using the approved MACS templates for schools.

# 16. Definitions

Definitions of standard terms used in this Policy can be found in the Glossary of Terms.

**Bullying**

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.

There are four main types of bullying behaviour:

- **physical bullying:** examples include hitting, pushing, shoving, intimidating or otherwise physically hurting another person, or damaging or stealing their belongings. It includes threats of violence.
- **verbal/written bullying:** examples include name-calling or insulting someone about an attribute, quality or personal characteristic.
- **social bullying or 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 behaviour can include specific forms:

- **racist bullying:** belittling, mocking, intimidating or shaming someone because of their physical appearance, ethnic background, religious or cultural practices, and/or the way they dress or talk.
- **homophobic and transphobic bullying:** bullying on the basis of sexuality or gender expression. It can include physical violence, cyberbullying, name-calling, exclusion, 'jokes' and/or sexual harassment. It is a common experience for young people who are same-sex attracted, gender diverse or for those who may not behave according to gender stereotypes. Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, queer, asexual and questioning (LGBTIQA+) students may not feel confident or safe enough to tell anyone about being bullied, especially if they have not disclosed their sexuality or gender identity to friends, family or teachers.

Bullying can be easy to see and detect (overt) or hidden, subtle and hard to detect (covert):

- **overt bullying:** involves physical actions such as punching or kicking, or observable verbal actions such as name-calling and insulting.
- **covert bullying:** can be very difficult for someone outside of the interaction to identify. It can include hand gestures and threatening looks, whispering, excluding or turning your back on a person, or restricting where a person can sit and who they can talk with. Social bullying (spreading rumours, manipulation of relationships, excluding, isolating) is often covert bullying.

Bullying is not:

- mutual conflict that involves a disagreement but not an imbalance of power – however, unresolved mutual conflict can develop into bullying if one of the parties targets the other repeatedly in retaliation.
- single-episode acts of nastiness or physical aggression, or aggression directed towards many different people.
- social rejection or dislike unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others.

# Related policies and documents

### Supporting documents

Student Bullying and Other Harmful Behaviour Investigation and Response Record
Student Bullying and Other Harmful Behaviour Response Pathway
Student Bullying and Other Harmful Behaviour Response Action Plan
Student Bullying Prevention and Response Procedures

### Related MACS policies and documents

Child Abuse Identification and Response Policy
Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
Child Safety and Wellbeing Recordkeeping Procedures
Code of Conduct for MACS Staff
Complaints Handling Policy for MACS Schools
Duty of Care Policy for MACS Schools
Enrolment Policy for MACS Schools
Parent/Guardian/Carer Code of Conduct
ICT Acceptable Usage Policy – Students
Pastoral Care Policy for MACS Schools
Reportable Conduct Policy
Student Behaviour Support Policy for MACS Schools
Student Behaviour Support Procedures
Student Code of Conduct
Suspension, Negotiated Transfer and Expulsion of Students Procedures

# Legislation and standards

*Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*
*Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
*Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic)
*Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* (Vic)
*Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic)
*Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth)
*Ministerial Order 1359 – Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the risk of child abuse in schools*
*Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth)
*Racial Hatred Act 1995* (Cth)
*Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth)

# Policy information

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| **Responsible director** | Director, Education Excellence |
| **Policy owner** | Chief of Student Services |
| **Approving authority** | MACS Board |
| **Assigned board committee** | Child Safety and Risk Management |
| **Approval date** | 5 August 2026 |
| **Risk Rating** | Extreme |
| **Next review required by** | August 2028 |
| **Publication** | MACS website, CEVN, school websites |

| **POLICY DATABASE INFORMATION** | |
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| **Assigned framework** | Care, Safety and Welfare of Students |
| **Supporting documents** | See list of supporting documents and related policies above |
| **Superseded documents** | Bullying Prevention Policy<br>Bullying Prevention Policy – template for schools<br>Bullying Prevention Procedures<br>Bullying Incident Response Action Plan<br>Bullying Incident Response Pathway<br>Bullying Record Keeping and Investigation Tool |