



Policy Statement

Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited [DOBCEL] is committed to providing all students a positive, respectful and safe learning environment that is inclusive and supportive.

Prevention of bullying against students is managed through a 'whole-of-school community' approach involving students, staff and parents/carers.

This policy aims to:

- support a culture of positive behaviour with high levels of student engagement as essential for creating a positive, respectful and safe learning environment;
- establish processes to be followed when students exhibit adverse behaviour;
- promote the safety and wellbeing of all the members of the school community;
- support the development of self-discipline, self-respect, self-worth, and respect for others;
- create an environment where the right of students to learn and the right of teachers to teach is respected;
- ensure bullying prevention strategies are tailored to the circumstances of each incident and implemented within schools on a continuous basis, with a focus on teaching age-appropriate skills and strategies to empower staff, students and parents/carers to recognise bullying and respond appropriately;
- assist staff to be positive role models.

DOBCEL schools are required to demonstrate they have in place *Bullying Prevention (including Cyber-bullying) Procedures*, appropriately contextualised from the DOBCEL template.

Context

This policy includes bullying, abuse and harassment behaviours that are exhibited online. Cyber-bullying can be an extension of face to face bullying or can be restricted to the online world using various communication systems. Throughout this policy, the word 'bullying' encompasses the term cyber-bullying as per the Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth). Additional procedures and guidelines relevant to cyber-bullying can be found in the Digital Technologies Policy and Procedures, as well as the Acceptable Use and Cyber Safety Agreement.

In accordance with Ministerial Order 1359 (MO 1359), all forms of bullying, abuse and harassment of students in the school environment, on campus, online and in other locations (provided by the school) are considered relevant in this policy.

Bullying in any form or for any reason can have long-term negative impacts. Intervening appropriately to respond to or prevent bullying is essential. Dealing with bullying involves tapping into students' motivations and understandings of social situations. The reasons for bullying will be found below the surface by investigating issues of power, norms and social status, tolerance and diversity. Exploring these areas and how they influence students' interactions and behaviour can provide essential insights into the most appropriate responses.

A National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools provides the framework for all school systems and schools to establish shared national expectations and actions and provide confidence that no matter where a student goes to school, bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (referred to as

bullying and other harmful behaviours) will be appropriately addressed and the school workforce supported to take appropriate action.

The National Standard considers bullying to be within a continuum of harmful behaviours and negative interpersonal behaviours, whether physical or psychosocial, that are counter to creating a safe learning environment.

Scope

This policy applies to all students enrolled in a DOBCEL school.

The application of this policy is not limited to school site and operating hours. It extends to all activities and events that are school-related, including when students are:

- on school grounds
- at any in school related activities or representing school (including for example camps, events, excursions, incursions, retreats, sport, awards nights)
- representing school, including when off campus, or in a digital environment
- travelling to and from school, as well as to and from off-site activities
- wearing the school uniform
- under the school's legal duty of care
- otherwise engaging in behaviour which, in the reasonable opinion of the school, may affect student health and safety, student relationships, staff health and safety, staff-student relationships, or the reputation of the school.

What is 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.

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.

Examples of bullying

Bullying can happen in different ways. Examples of bullying include:

Verbal bullying	includes name calling, teasing, abuse, putdowns (particularly those which refer to personal characteristics and impact on self-esteem), sarcasm, insults, threats of unfair criticism, suggestive comments, rumour spreading.
Non-verbal bullying	includes writing offensive notes, graffiti about others, rude gestures, damaging other people's possessions.
Physical bullying	includes physical actions such as hitting, pushing, obstructing, rubbing, grabbing, punching, kicking, scratching, tripping, spitting, taking/damaging property, using a weapon and any other unwelcome physical contact used to intimidate or hurt someone.
Cyber-bullying	includes the ongoing abuse of power to threaten or harm another person using technology, this can occur in chat rooms, on social networking sites, through emails, text messaging, the internet or other online forums. Further detail on cyberbullying is provided later in this policy.
Social bullying	includes ignoring, excluding, ostracising, alienating including forming groups to leave out, disrespect, making inappropriate gestures, looks, stares, facial expressions.

Racial bullying	includes treating someone inappropriately because of their race, including by using racial slurs, making inappropriate comments in respect of a person's race, or excluding a person because of their race.
Ableism	includes treating someone differently or unfairly because of a disability or additional needs, including by using inappropriate slurs, seeking to trigger a person in respect of their disability, or excluding a person because of their disability.
Sexual bullying	includes any unwelcome written, verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature (including those actions which are perceived to be sexual in nature), sexually orientated jokes, drawings of or writing about another person's body, unwanted invitations of a sexual nature, showing explicit images without permission and asking questions about another person's sexual activity or orientation.
Psychological bullying	includes words or actions that are used to cause psychological harm. Examples of psychological bullying include name calling, teasing, hiding or damaging possessions or making fun of someone because of their actions, appearance, physical characteristics or cultural background. Malicious SMS and email messages, voice and text messages, and inappropriate use of camera phones, photographic and video images is also a form of psychological bullying.
Indirect bullying	includes deliberate acts of exclusion or spreading of untrue stories to hurt or intimidate someone. Indirect bullying also includes influencing or organising someone else to bully or harass another person to hurt or intimidate someone.
Harassment	includes unwelcome or unreciprocated behaviour that makes a person feel offended, humiliated, belittled, degraded, devalued, or intimidated. Harassment may be a single incident or a series of incidents and may also include behaviour which is discriminatory on the basis of a personal characteristic such as race, age, gender, disability, religion, or sexuality.

Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is direct verbal or indirect bullying behaviour using digital technologies. This includes harassment via a mobile phone, setting up a defamatory personal website or deliberately excluding someone from social networking.

Cyber-bullying can be particularly damaging because of the capacity to humiliate, hurt and harm a person in front of a huge 'audience'.

A dangerous feature of cyber-bullying is that it can be done quickly and easily. On an impulse, a person can create emotional havoc for another and do so before the voice of reason hints at the inappropriateness of the action. A further problem with cyber bullying is that the person bullying is often unaware of the extent of the harm they are causing because cyber bullying seldom occurs face-to-face.

The feedback is muted by distance so that they are protected from an understanding of the awfulness of their behaviour. Cyber-bullying represents unlawful activity that may result in police laying charges. Cyber-bullying has been linked to depression, self-harm and even suicide.

Further examples of cyber-bullying include:

- sending hateful or threatening comments or pictures via an instant messaging service, mobile phone or the internet and by social networking sites such as TikTok, Snapchat, Messenger, Be Real, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), Tumblr, and Facebook
- sending messages containing emojis intended to be hateful, threatening or otherwise harmful
- using modern technologies to engage in the social exclusion of someone and in hate group recruitment, including through comment sections or within private group chats
- posting online rude, explicit or embarrassing messages, comments or pictures about someone
- stealing someone's identity or otherwise impersonating a person to harm them in some way

- putting pressure on a person to send revealing or compromising pictures of themselves
- covertly filming, recording or taking a picture of someone and posting the images on the Internet to cause hurt
- disseminating confidential information about someone
- ‘flaming’ and multi-messaging to clog up a person’s electronic system and to cause them distress
- using aliases and pseudonyms in chat rooms and on social networking sites to harass and upset
- engaging in cyber-stalking and invading privacy.

What is not bullying?

Many distressing behaviours are not examples of bullying, even though they are unpleasant and often require teacher intervention and management.

Behaviours that do not constitute bullying include:

Single-episode acts	Single episodes of nastiness, intimidation, violence or acts of physical aggression are not the same as bullying. If a student is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied. Nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different students is not the same as bullying. That said, single incidents can still constitute a breach of the school’s standards and expectations, and can warrant disciplinary outcomes.
Mutual conflict	Bullying behaviour is not disagreements between equals, situations of mutual conflict or children not getting along well. In mutual conflict situations, there is an argument or disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the problem. However, unresolved mutual conflict sometimes develops into a bullying situation with one person becoming targeted repeatedly for ‘retaliation’ in a one-sided way.
Social rejection or dislike	Not liking a person or a one-off act of social rejection, meanness or spite is not bullying. Unless the social rejection is directed towards someone specific and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others, it is not bullying.

Reporting bullying

Students and parents/carers are sometimes reluctant to raise bullying incidents, for fear that it will only make matters worse.

A key part of the bullying prevention and intervention policy is to encourage reporting of bullying incidents as well providing assurance to students who experience bullying (and their parents/carers/guardians) that:

- bullying is not tolerated within schools
- their concerns will be taken seriously
- schools have a clear strategy for dealing with bullying concerns.

Staff, students and parents are encouraged to report bullying so that it can be dealt with appropriately. Most often, it can be dealt with internally at the school level. However, in some instances, it may be appropriate to report bullying to other authorities, in the case of behaviours which may constitute a crime, or serious online bullying.

If suspected bullying is reported to a school, students and parents can expect that a member of staff will:

- find a suitable place to talk, or make a time to discuss the problem privately
- avoid minimising the issue, or saying dismissive things that imply the issue is not important
- ensure that their voice is calm and body language is open as they listen to the concerns being raised
- listen without interrupting, using only encouraging questions or sounds to show they are listening
- ask specific questions to clarify or seek more details only after the student has shared their version of events
- ask the student: “who, what, when, why, how and where” questions, including:
 - what words have been said or written?
 - has anyone been physically hurt and how?
 - who is usually around?
 - who else has the student told about this?
 - is there any evidence of what has happened? This typically relates to screenshots etc. in instances of cyberbullying.
- ask the student questions to help distinguish between single incidents of conflict and an ongoing pattern of bullying
- ask the student to write down any information they have about their concerns
- praise the student for speaking out, and acknowledge that talking about it takes lots of courage
- ask the student what they want the school to do in response (for example, a stop bullying conversation or a formal investigation). The school will consider a range of possible outcomes, including (but not limited to) the implementation of a class seating plan, assigning a mentor to the accused victim or bully or both, and referrals to wellbeing and support services
- reassure the student that:
 - they will be supported and assisted by the school
 - bullying is not tolerated by the school
 - it is never okay to be bullied
 - it is not their fault that the other person is behaving in such a way that makes the student feel the way they are feeling
 - the school takes their concerns seriously and that the school will follow up as quickly as possible
- ask the student if they feel safe in the short term and consider whether interim preventative safety measures may need to be implemented.

The school will further ensure that any students accused of bullying are afforded procedural fairness, including being given the opportunity to respond.

Implementation

The Bullying Prevention (including Cyber-bullying) Policy is implemented by DOBCEL schools through a combination of:

- staff training
- student and parent/carer education and information
- effective incident reporting and recording procedures
- effective management of bullying incidents when reported
- the creation of a ‘no-bullying’ culture within the school community
- effective record keeping procedures
- initiation of corrective actions where necessary.

Legislative Context

- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)
- Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic)
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
- Ministerial Order 1359 – Child Safe Standards
- Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth)

Definitions specific to this policy

TERM	DEFINITION
Bullying	<p>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.</p> <p>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.¹</p>
Cyber-bullying	Cyber-bullying is direct verbal or indirect bullying behaviour using digital technologies. This includes harassment via a mobile phone, setting up a defamatory personal website or deliberately excluding someone from social networking.
Communication systems	Email, video conferencing, instant messaging (public or private), electronic bulletins/noticeboards, electronic discussion/news groups, weblogs (blogs), social and professional networking (e.g., use of Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Twitter, in accordance with age restrictions) and any other material (video / image, etc) sent electronically.
Record	A record is information in any format created, received and maintained as evidence of business activities and decisions. A record may be digital (such as an email, Word, Excel, PowerPoint or finalised and/or scanned PDF documents) or hardcopy (paper) format.
School environment	Means any of the following physical, online or virtual places used during or outside school hours: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a campus of the school• online or virtual school environments made available or authorised by DOBCEL or a DOBCEL school for use by a child or student (including email, intranet systems, software, applications, collaboration tools and online services)• other locations provided by the school or through a third-party provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for camps, approved homestay accommodation, delivery of education and training, sporting events, excursions, competitions and other events) (<i>Ministerial Order No. 1359</i>).

¹ The national definition of bullying for Australian schools <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/understanding-bullying>

Supporting Policies

- Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy [DOBCEL]
- Child Safe Standards - Recordkeeping Policy
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Grievance Policy (Community) [School]
- Grievance Policy (Student) [School]
- Digital Technologies Policy and Procedures
- Diversity and Equity Policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- Modern Slavery Policy
- Student Empowerment and Participation Policy

DOBCEL Principles of Governance

All DOBCEL policies are founded on and reflect the Principles of Governance stated in the Document: [DOBCEL Principles of Governance](#)

Approving authority	DOBCEL Board
Approval Date	December 2025
Review Date	December 2028