BULLYING PREVENTION POLICY

Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy, please contact Heathmont College on 9871 4888.

PURPOSE

Heathmont 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 shared understanding amongst all members of the Heathmont College community
- make clear that no form of bullying at Heathmont College will be tolerated
- outline the strategies and programs in place at Heathmont College 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 accept responsibility to report 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 and students engaging in bullying behaviour)
- seek parental and peer group support in addressing and preventing bullying behaviour at Heathmont College.

When responding to bullying behaviour, Heathmont College 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.

Heathmont College 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 Heathmont College aims to prevent, address and respond to student bullying behaviour. Heathmont 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

school. These other inappropriate behaviours will be managed in accordance with our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy and Inclusion and Diversity Policy.

This policy applies to all school activities, including camps and excursions.

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.

Bullying can be:

1. *direct* physical bullying – e.g. hitting, tripping, and pushing or damaging property.
2. *direct* verbal bullying – e.g. name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks, verbal abuse.
3. *indirect* bullying – e.g. spreading rumours, playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate, mimicking, encouraging others to socially exclude a person and/or damaging a person's social reputation or social acceptance.

Cyberbullying is direct or indirect bullying behaviours using digital technology. For example via a mobile device, computers, chat rooms, email, social media, etc. It can be verbal, written and include images, video and/or audio.

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 and Engagement Policy.

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. Heathmont College will use its Student Wellbeing and Engagement 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. Further information about these two forms of harassment, including definitions, is set out in our Inclusion and Diversity Policy Harassment of any kind will not be tolerated at Heathmont College and may have serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour. Heathmont College will use its Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy to guide a response to students demonstrating harassing behaviour, unless the behaviour also constitutes bullying, in which case the behaviour will be managed in accordance with this Bullying Prevention Policy.

Bullying Prevention

Heathmont College has a number of programs and strategies in place to build a positive and inclusive school culture. We strive to foster a school culture that prevents bullying behaviour by modelling and encouraging behaviour that demonstrates acceptance, kindness and respect.

Bullying prevention at Heathmont 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 school:

- We have a positive school environment that provides safety, security and support for students and promotes positive relationships and wellbeing.
- 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.
- 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.
- The Flourish 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 awareness days against Bullying and Violence.

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

Incident Response

Reporting concerns to Heathmont College

Bullying complaints will be taken seriously and responded to sensitively at our school.

Students who may be experiencing bullying behaviour, or students who have witnessed bullying behaviour, are encouraged to report their concerns to school staff 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 Heathmont College are timely and appropriate in the circumstances.

We encourage students to speak to their classroom teacher, Mentor Group Leader, House Leader or Year Level Coordinator. However, students are welcome to discuss their concerns with any trusted member of staff including teachers, wellbeing staff, education support staff and the principal team.

Parents or carers who develop concerns that their child is involved in, or has witnessed bullying behaviour at Heathmont College should contact their child's Mentor Group Teacher, Year Level Coordinator or the Assistant Principal of Wellbeing and Student Management by phone on 9871 4888 or through the Compass Learning Management system. Email is also an acceptable method of communication if this has been established. If parents wish to email the school account on heathmont.co@education.vic.gov.au, the administration staff will also direct the communication to a relevant staff member.

Investigations

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

1. record the details of the allegations in Compass; and
2. inform the relevant House Leader and Year Level Coordinator.

The House Leader is responsible for supporting the wellbeing of students involved in bullying claims and incidents (including alleged perpetrators) and Year Level Coordinators will investigate allegations of bullying in a timely and sensitive manner. To appropriately investigate an allegation of bullying, the Year Level Coordinator 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 parents 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 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.

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 Year Level Coordinator or House Leader 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 Wellbeing Team, teachers, Assistant Principal, Principal, Department of Education and Training specialist staff.

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, Heathmont College will consider:

- the age and maturity 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 their behaviour
- the alleged motive of the behaviour, including any element of provocation.

A staged response to bullying is employed at the college as bullying, by definition, is a repeated action and our intent as a school is to prevent unwanted or inappropriate behaviour to be repeated and, hence, classes as bullying.

The **first instance** of behaviour that meets the criteria of bullying outlined above will result in clear warning and counselling of all students involved with formal consequences being issued ass appropriate to the nature of the behaviour expressed. For example, an act of physical violence would warrant a consequence however, behaviour such as name calling or social exclusion may not.

Any subsequent acts of bullying by the same student will result in escalated consequences consistent with the severity of the behaviour expressed.

For all students involved in such incidents, both counselling or education strategies will be combined with formal consequences to support behavioural change and to prevent further acts occurring.

Support and Educative Strategies may include:

- offer of counselling support to students involved through a referral to the Wellbeing Team.
- Restorative meetings between the parties involved aimed at developing empathy and understanding between students and preventing future incidents.
- Students may also be referred to behavioral change courses or workshops as relevant or available. Often these are facilitated by external providers and are organised by the Wellbeing Team.
- Students may be referred for 'Respectful Relationships' activities or education sessions which will be facilitated by internal staff.
- Students may be referred for the school mentoring or Learning Support Program, as appropriate.
- Student Support Group meeting where a support plan is developed to ensure behaviour is not repeated and all parties are informed of expectations.
- Safety plans are often used as a strategy to support students where mutual conflict is an issue or where one or more parties feels unsafe in the school environment. Where a safety plan is developed, all parties will have their own plan developed and will be expected to comply with

this. Failure to comply with a safety plan will result in formal consequences being applied as appropriate.

Formal Consequences that may be applied as appropriate to the nature of the behaviour expressed, if behaviour is repeated or if a student fails to comply with supportive conditions may include:

- removal of yard access privileges,
- after school or lunch time detentions,
- 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.

Please note that any act of violence or perceived threat of violence will result in a minimum of exclusion from class / yard. Physical violence, in particular poses such as significant risk to student safety that it will not be tolerated in any form.

Heathmont 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 and in line with Privacy Law, school staff will also endeavour to provide parents and carers with updates on the management of bullying incidents.

Year Level Coordinators are 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
- Included in staff induction processes
- Included in our Staff Information Portal
- Discussed at staff briefings/meetings as required
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions as required
- Included in student and staff diaries so that it is easily accessible to parents, carers and students
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Included as annual reference in school newsletter
- Made available in hard copy from school administration upon request

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Statement of Values and School Philosophy
- Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
- Parent Complaints policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- Child Safety Policy
- Inclusion and Diversity 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
- Kids Helpline
- Lifeline
- Bullying. No way!
- Student Wellbeing Hub
- Office of the eSafety Commissioner
- Australian Student Wellbeing Framework

EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, or earlier as required following an incident or analysis of new research or school data relating to bullying, to ensure that the policy remains up to date, practical and effective.

Data will be collected through:
- discussion and consultation with students and parent/carers
- staff 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, parent groups and school council.

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	October 2021
Consultation	In consultation with House Leaders, Leadership Team, School Council, Student Representative Council
Approved by	Kerryn Sandford, Principal
Next scheduled review date	October 2024