



MELBOURNE
RUDOLF STEINER
SCHOOL

ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

For Students and Staff

The school's anti-bullying policy arises out of a wider impulse to promote the wellbeing of the school community and all its individuals.

May 2022

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Preamble

“The healthy social life is found
When in the mirror of each human soul
The whole community finds its reflection
And when in the community
The virtue of each one is living”

Rudolf Steiner

The school’s anti-bullying policy arises out of a wider impulse to promote the wellbeing of the school community and all its individuals.

Within the details that follow, references are made to underlying principles of Steiner philosophy. If parents find that they would be interested in further details, and/or explanations of these principles in greater depth, they should contact the school office so that they can be directed to the relevant teacher.

Definition

“Bullying” is characterized by persistent, intentional, targeted, hurtful behaviour involving a power imbalance. The behaviour may be physical, verbal, social or psychological. Cyberbullying refers to the same behaviour employing information and communication technology.¹

Given this definition and the school’s founding philosophy on the evolving consciousness of the child, the term “bullying” is rarely applied in the early years (Kindergarten to mid-primary) for a number of reasons. In the first place, persistent, targeted behaviour is itself rare. Secondly, in this unselfconscious stage of childhood, the intentional nature of behaviour often requires qualification. Thirdly, using the label “bullying” (as defined above) to describe the behaviour of young children is usually considered to be unproductive and risks diminishing the significance of the term and seriousness of its application in later years.

¹ The school recommends, on pedagogical grounds, that students’ access to such technology, and especially to social media, be minimized and monitored. It will be observed that such an approach will also minimize the risk of cyberbullying.

People can, of course, understand and apply the term “bullying” differently to the school, and productive dialogue can still take place between parties with divergent definitions. It is important to be clear that, in the school’s view, such things as isolated instances of hurtful behaviour, conflict between equals, thoughtless remarks and social mistakes are not to be considered bullying. It is also noteworthy that feelings, impressions and experiences often associated with being bullied – such as believing oneself to be wronged, excluded and victimized – can occur without bullying taking place. They may be the result of misunderstandings, misconceptions or difficulties in an individual’s unique path of development. As teachers, we are deeply concerned when our students are experiencing difficulties in their lives (whatever the cause); we observe carefully in order to be aware when this is the case; and we redouble our efforts to support them whenever necessary.

A number of other considerations should be included with regard to our understanding of what does and does not constitute bullying.

In Kindergarten, the children will find themselves – perhaps for the first time – in a social situation without their parents. They naturally begin to experiment, imitate and explore social behaviours, both right and wrong. The Kindergarten teachers facilitate the transition from home to school and guide the children toward healthy social interactions.

A Steiner class is made up of individual human beings on individual paths of development connected physically by the school and spiritually by destiny. In the initial phase of their school journey, members of the same class can have very different levels of maturity and social understanding, a situation that will naturally create occasional misunderstandings and conflicts. In the process of allowing such “difficulties/opportunities” to find an appropriate social resolution, a high regard for one another is engendered in the class. In consequence, when a Year 12 Class farewell the entire school in an assembly on their final day, they positively radiate love and respect for one another.

Children must experience antipathy as well as sympathy. Our class teachers work consciously with these feelings, directing the children’s antipathy and sympathy appropriately. Nevertheless, it does happen that some children can feel that they hate each other for a while, children who are perfectly healthy members of the class and who are clearly and firmly on an individual path to moral uprightness.

By Class Five, a number of changes have taken place. First, the children have, in Class Three and/or Four, passed through the developmental phase we describe as “The Crossing.” This sees them become conscious of themselves as an ego, an individual who is separate to others and to the outer world. Second, personality tends to assert itself more strongly during Class Four. Third, a capacity for reasoning is beginning to emerge, that will, in normal development, establish itself as a grasp of cause and effect relationships in Class 6. In short, the children are able more fully to comprehend the effect of their words and deeds on others and vice versa. With this increased awareness comes increased responsibility. In Class Five, therefore, and certainly in the high school, it may well be appropriate and productive both to employ the term bullying in discussions with students and also, if warranted, to apply it to an individual’s behaviour.

Stance

The school holds the view that bullying violates the rights of students to feel safe, free and valued, and can have long-term negative effects on all those involved.

The school does not tolerate any form of bullying.

Approach

The school's approach can be characterized as three-tiered, beginning with the general and moving to the specific, and encompassing prevention, resolution of difficulties before bullying can emerge and intervention when bullying has occurred.

1. The school has created and seeks always to safeguard a school environment, atmosphere and culture in which students' individuality and purpose can develop in freedom. Relevant features of this creation are community, familiarity and respect.

At our school, teachers, parents and children are aware of forming a community united by a common purpose. Teachers have committed themselves to an education that values the whole child. Parents have consciously chosen this education for their children. And, of course, the children respond by bringing their gifts to the community. Within the classroom, time is devoted to teacher and children forming a unique class. Beyond the classroom, time is devoted to communication between teachers and parents, especially during the primary years, through regular class meetings and parent-teacher interviews. Class communities come together for festivals, concerts and dinners.

Familiarity is fostered by a number of structural and pedagogical advantages. We are a relatively small school. The staff turnover is low. Many students attend from pre-school playgroups to Year 12 (and even later return every now and then to maintain contact). The Class Teacher stays with the class from Class One to Eight. Class Guardians join a class in Class Seven and ideally take the class through to late secondary level. Teachers and students address each other on a first name basis and share communal spaces such as the school's dining room.

Respect for the incarnating child is central to our guiding philosophy, meaning that we value individual difference as a matter of course. Our aim is never to make a child fit a certain mould, but instead to facilitate the development of each unique individual. We value inclusiveness, empathy, sensitivity and openness to beauty and encourage our students to do the same, as these attributes are essential for the development of the self.

In this context, social upsets and conflicts are minimized, while bullying behaviour stands out as inimical to the social fabric of the school.

2. So, our school environment, atmosphere and culture ensure that the overwhelming majority of social interactions between the members of our community are positive. Nevertheless, things can and do go wrong. The "second tier" of our approach involves enabling our students to resolve social conflicts before they escalate.

We show faith and place trust in our students. We encourage them to be resourceful and resilient. Often, when a dispute arises, it is settled promptly and effectively by the honest voice of a majority of the students present, or even that of an individual. If a teacher's guidance is needed, this is provided in a way that seeks to be fair, restores peace, and gives the students the opportunity to learn how to avoid such disputes in the future. This can be achieved by helping them to see when and where, in the events of the dispute, things could have been done differently.

3. The school is aware that these first two tiers cannot guarantee a situation where persistent, intentional, targeted, hurtful behaviour can never take place. A third tier – that of serious intervention and remediation by teachers, and possibly action by the College of Teachers – is necessary, as explained in the following sections.

Strategies

Within a context of overall consistency, teachers' responses to social issues among the students, from minor upsets through to bullying, will vary in details in order to account for the individual circumstance of each case. In most cases, however, one or more of the following strategies would normally be employed:

KINDERGARTEN

- role-play: e.g., using morning circle to teach concepts of Yes and No, inclusivity etc.
- using imaginative pictures to describe and discourage undesirable behaviour: e.g., "We are not a kicking donkey, scratchy cat, etc."
- having the children actively amend a negative situation by doing something positive for the victim: e.g., fetching them a glass of water.
- allowing time for resolution, including the opportunity for children to tell their side of the story.
- appealing to the older children within the group to acknowledge that we are all learning.
- work with and communicate with parents.
- Curative Eurythmy.
- animal handling and daily care to awaken the sense of touch, warmth and care in a child.

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOL

- role-modelling: teachers treat each other and students with respect. Parents have an important role to play. A courageous and inclusive approach to situations involving one's own child is enormously helpful. Often, parents have organized a play outside of school time for young children who have a difficult relationship in the classroom and/or playground. It is remarkable how often children who have experienced conflict become good friends.

- employing authority: in the primary years, the Class Teacher is seen as a “loving authority.” Sometimes a few well chosen (and usually positively phrased) words from this authority are all that is needed to support an individual child or to resolve an undesirable social situation within a class.
- employing imagination and intuition: a Class Teacher may compose and tell a story that will work at a subliminal level to bring about a desired effect for an individual or a group.
- appealing to the children’s natural admiration for older students: a teacher may describe a situation among high school students, with parallels to a dispute that has occurred between primary students, in such a way that the younger children are left wanting to emulate the upright behaviour of their elders.
- maintaining strong daily rhythms of the school and the classroom that help to hold children in the social realm of school life.
- appealing to the children’s higher self: a morning and afternoon verse is spoken daily with the class that appeals to the children’s better self and helps to set the tone and mood and expectations of the classroom and a reverence for the world around them.
- consciously working with an understanding of the pedagogical development of the children and the curriculum to support a healthy social dynamic.
- consciously working with the arts and artistic mediums within daily activities to ennoble children’s behavior and process content and feelings in a healthy way.
- increased awareness in the Class Teacher’s nightly meditation and relevant teachers’ meetings.
- The College of Teachers’ child-study.
- increased supervision.
- access to external additional support on site for example Extra Lesson and/or Curative Eurythmy.
- recommendations to additional therapeutic support for example art therapy and/or counselling
- analysis of students’ work and play.
- increased communication by teachers with individual students, groups of students and/or whole classes.
- involving the school’s Welfare Officer to work with individual students, groups of students and/or whole classes.
- in cases of sufficient seriousness, a warning process may be implemented: warning, subsequent warning/s with suspension, expulsion.

- in certain circumstances and at any stage in the response to an identified case of bullying, it may be necessary to suspend the perpetrator until the matter can be resolved to the satisfaction of the College of Teachers.
- in severe and/or aggravated cases, the College of Teachers reserves the right to expel the perpetrator from the school.

Process

All students at our school have a Kindergarten Teacher, Class Teacher or Class Guardian who has special care of their year level. In cases of social upset or conflict, possibly involving an allegation of bullying, the first step in the process of response is for the relevant teacher to attempt to discover what has happened/is happening. In many cases, discussions between students and teacher at this stage in the process are enough to resolve the matter.

Where a teacher discovers that bullying has taken/is taking place, a response involving one or more of the above strategies is determined. This response should include informing the parents of the students involved.

We also encourage parents to inform the school of concerns as they arise, and not to let them multiply or accumulate. The first point of contact is always the relevant Kindergarten Teacher, Class Teacher or Class Guardian. If the matter remains unresolved in the minds of the parents, they can request a follow up meeting with the relevant Kindergarten Teacher, Class Teacher or Class Guardian, and possibly another appropriate member of the teaching staff. If the matter is still unresolved, parents should write to the College of Teachers, via the school's Administration Group.

Communication

The school rejects all forms of bullying and communicates this to students and the school community in a variety of ways. Our actions are the underpinning of the culture of the school, that is to meet the other in respect, openness and care. This sets a tone and culture that flows right through the school, staff, students and community.

Zero tolerance to bullying is embedded and behaviour worthy of imitation is fostered, from the first encounter with the school on information mornings, through the enrolment process, school documents such as the parent handbook, as well as the ongoing communication between parents and teachers.

From the time your child becomes a member of the class, and the family a member of the school community the class teachers and guardians communicate this policy via parent teacher evenings and specific meetings with parents where required, class emails and letters to parents.

Our policy is available on our website, in the parent handbook and sent in our weekly newsletter from time to time.

New staff members are made aware that the school rejects any form of bullying via the first contact with the school via interview, induction and the staff handbook and from the actions and culture of the school that they observe around them.

When the anti-bullying policy is due for review all staff are asked to consider, reflect, identify and suggest any changes that they feel can support the ongoing healthy culture of our school. Once this is done the college can discuss and amend the policy to reflect the current needs and situation of the school.

Recording and Reporting

Our school treats every bullying incident as serious and is dealt with confidentially and respectfully. All accounts and incidents in regards to any allegations or actions of bullying are dated and documented by the class teacher/guardian/s. Any communication verbal or written with student, parents / guardians in regards to the matter are dated and documented and kept securely with the student's record. The records are kept in the school office and/or with the class teacher/ guardians student files in line with the schools privacy policy. Any discussions, support or advice with other school staff/ colleagues, strategies, actions and monitoring are also dated and documented until the situation or incident is confidently resolved, in which the documentation is then archived but accessible if another incident was to arise.