Policy and Procedure: Anti-Bullying

Policy

PLC Sydney and PLC Armidale (hereinafter called *The College*) is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people, to acting in students' best interests and to keeping them safe from harm.

The College is a Christian school and this leads the College to seek to develop culture over utility. The assumption is that bullying will reduce if there is a good culture. The College thus positively teaches 'Respect for Others' (see Appendix A) to articulate how the College community is expected to treat one another. Further, the Peacewise framework is used both as a teaching tool (it is grounded in the Sermon on the Mount and actively taught in Christian Studies, chapels and assemblies) and as a means of assisting community members who come into conflict or rivalry to address the issues (through the College mentoring program).

By identifying friendship, conflict, rivalry and mean behaviour, the "Respect for Others'' document and Peacewise principles, the College prioritises prevention over cure. We value virtues over utility. We value culture over bureaucratic processes.

The College recognises that, even with the best functioning culture, issues will still arise and not be able to be resolved through Peacewise, as it requires the goodwill of both people to function. This is one instance when the bullying framework may be enacted.

The College recognises its duty to students to provide a safe and positive learning environment where individual differences and diversity within the College is respected and accepted. Bullying is not tolerated at the College.

It is College policy that:

- bullying be managed through a 'whole-of-College community' approach involving students, staff and parents/guardians

- bullying prevention strategies are implemented within the College on a continuous basis with a focus on teaching age-appropriate skills and strategies to empower staff, students and parents/guardians to recognise bullying and respond appropriately

- bullying response strategies are tailored to the circumstances of each incident

- we establish procedures for reporting and responding to child safety concerns, including when the behaviour may be an indicator of child abuse and other harm

- staff establish positive role models emphasising our no bullying culture

- bullying prevention and intervention strategies are reviewed on a regular basis against best practice guidelines.

Policy and Procedure Owner: Executive Team

Contents

Scope

1. This Policy and Procedure applies to all College activities, including camps and excursions. It also applies outside of school hours and off College premises where students have been involved, and there is a clear and close connection to the College.

Definitions and Supporting Documents

2. There are four key words defined below: conflict, rivalry, mean behaviour and bullying.

3. There are two key aspects that relate to this policy: The 'Respect for Others' document (Appendix A) and the Peacewise framework.

4. PLC Sydney has a partnership with Peacewise which is a Christian, cross-denominational, not for profit peacemaking ministry. By teaching and applying the Peacewise principles, the College aims to equip people to have stronger, better relationships.

Friendship

5. The College holds friendship as a relationship to foster and encourage. The College believes that identity is relational before it is categorical. Whilst recognising that the College can not create friendships, we foster them by providing opportunities (classes, sporting and cultural groups, events) and status (one uniform, one broad experience of school) that enable friendships to grow. We also hold sessions on how to enable and grow relationships. It is a common theme of chapel services.

Conflict

6. Conflict is a part of life. As individuals with consciences and volition, we are each able to form our own views, and develop our own understanding of ethical and moral issues. This can bring us into conflict.

7. Conflict is healthy in a democracy. Each student needs to be encouraged to work out her own beliefs and to communicate them in a respectful manner. Whilst we join together in a christian school that promotes listening to each other (in the sense identified by Gadamer i.e., *that if I am listening well to you, I will be able to report back to you what I think you meant when you communicated with me, in a manner that leads you to agree that I have heard you properly*), and whilst we may utilise frameworks like Peacewise to respond to disputes, we recognise that conflict will still occur.

8. An issue is considered 'conflict' when the participants have roughly equal power. Conflict is not bullying, but it can lead to bullying.

Rivalry

9. Rivalry is a powerful social force in schools.

10. The College adopts the model used by [Rene Girard](). He noted that human beings tend to mimic what we desire. Thus, one student might form the belief that she will be more secure or more significant as a person if she commits to, say, drama or to a sport. Another girl may hear her talk about her decision and decide that she also could be more secure or significant if she joined drama. Thus she has mimicked the first girl. A friendship is likely to blossom, built around a common interest. If, however, the two students are placed in a position where there is competition within the program (e.g., for a lead part in the play, or for a spot in the Firsts team in sport) rivalry is likely to develop. The important recognition is that girls who were friends can easily become rivals. Other areas where rivalry can occur include: for romantic attention, for the attention of a parent or trusted adult, for good marks, for the favour of the school, for an award, to be noticed by a trusted person.

11. Whilst rivalry is not bullying, it can lead to it.

Mean Behaviour

12. Mean behaviour is action by one student *against* another's person, interests or social connectivity. It is designed to lower the status, sense of goodwill or purpose, or social connections of another person. It is designed to 'put down' the other person.

13. Mean behaviour, when repeated, is bullying.

14. Mean behaviour will receive a strong sanction (e.g., detention, denial of privilege, suspension) dependent on its severity.

15. Parents will be informed about mean behaviour.

Bullying

16. 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.

17. 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).

18. Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders.

19. Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

20. Bullying can take many forms including:

Physical bullying

21. Involves physical actions such as hitting, pushing, obstructing or using one's physical presence, or physical bodily acts, to hurt or intimidate someone or threaten violence. Damaging, stealing or hiding personal belongings is also a form of physical bullying.

Verbal/written bullying

22. Examples include: name-calling or insulting someone about an attribute, quality or personal characteristic.

Social (also called relational or emotional bullying)

23. Examples include deliberate acts of exclusion, spreading rumours or sharing information to have a harmful effect on the other person and/or damaging a person's social reputation or social acceptance.

Cyberbullying

24. Misuse of power within a relationship to repeatedly threaten or harm another person using technology. Cyberbullying behaviour may include:
    - abusive texts and emails
    - hurtful messages, images or videos
    - imitating others online
    - excluding others online
    - humiliating others online
    - spreading nasty online gossip and chat
    - creating fake accounts or 'avatars' to trick someone or humiliate them.

25. Cyberbullying can occur on internet services, social media and electronic services that enable communication including, but not limited to, instant messaging, chat services, email communications, online games, SMS and MMS. It can be verbal or written and can include images, videos and/or audio. These behaviours can also be an indicator of child abuse and other harm.

26. Bullying can be illegal if it involves intimidation, stalking, physical violence, threats of violence or damaging property.

What Isn't Bullying?

27. There are many negative situations that, whilst potentially distressing for students, are not bullying. These include:

    - Mutual Conflict Situations which arise where there is disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Mutual conflict situations need to be closely monitored as they may evolve into a bullying situation.

- One-off acts (of aggression or mean on purpose behaviour) including single incidents of loss of temper, shouting or swearing do not normally constitute bullying.

Bullying Prevention Strategies

28. When the whole College is across the terms 'conflict' and 'rivalry' there is a better chance of parents and students identifying bullying. [Miroslav Volf](#) makes the excellent point that it is the person who has been hurt, or bullied, who is most likely to bully. A person may even bully by identifying themselves as a victim and by enacting 'the law' against another person. If staff are trained to see rivalry in its embryonic form, we can lessen instances of bullying. Further, the work of the chaplains is critical here. Their teaching of the Peacewise framework helps the whole school.

29. The following initiatives form part of our overall bullying prevention strategy and our strategy to create a 'no-bullying' culture within the College:

   - a structured curriculum and peer group support system, that provides age-appropriate information and social and emotional competencies relating to bullying (including cyberbullying) and bullying prevention, to students over the course of the academic year

   - education, training and professional development (PD) of staff in bullying prevention and response strategies

   - appropriate sharing among staff of information about cyberbullying incidents

   - regular provision of information to parents/guardians, to raise awareness of bullying as a College community issue to equip them to recognise signs of bullying, as well as to provide them with clear paths for raising any concerns they may have relating to bullying directly with the College

   - promotion of a supportive environment that encourages the development of positive relationships and communication between staff, students and parents/guardians

   - promotion of responsible bystander behaviour amongst students, staff and parents/guardians

   - reporting of incidents of alleged bullying by students, bystanders, parents/guardians and staff are encouraged, and made easy through the establishment of multiple reporting channels (as specified below)

   - students are supported by their teachers, pastoral care staff and the College leadership when they report a bullying incident and during the processes that follow the submission of the report

   - records of reported bullying incidents are maintained and analysed, in order to identify students who persistently intimidate or bully and/or students who are persistently bullied and to implement targeted prevention strategies where appropriate

- statements supporting bullying prevention are included in the student handbook

- education of staff, students and parents/guardians on health conditions to promote understanding and to reduce stigma and fear

- promotion of student awareness and a 'no-bullying' environment by participating in events such as the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence

How to Identify Bullying

30. Major behavioural changes in a student may be indicative of being bullied. These behavioural changes may include:

   - becoming withdrawn and lacking confidence

   - appearing lonely or distressed

   - refusing to talk when asked, "What's wrong?"

   - having unexplained bruises, cuts or scratches

   - an unwillingness or refusal to go to school, a school-organised activity or reluctance to attend other social events

   - feeling ill in the mornings

   - a decline in the quality of school work

   - unexpected changes in friendship groups

   - beginning to display bullying behaviour towards siblings

   - crying at night and having nightmares.

31. Students may also not disclose cyberbullying to adults for fear that the adults may overreact and make the situation worse. Signs of cyberbullying to watch out for may include one or more of the behavioural changes outlined above, and/or other signs, including a student:

   - being upset after using the internet or their mobile phone

   - being hesitant to go online, avoiding their phone or seeming nervous when an instant message, text message or email appears

   - spending unusually long hours online or on their mobile phone

   - becoming secretive about their online activities and mobile phone use.

32. Parents/guardians are encouraged to recognise signs of bullying and notify the College through a trusted staff member immediately (such as a class teacher or Head of Year), if they suspect that their child is being bullied. These behaviours can also be an indicator of child abuse and other harm.

Reporting Bullying

33. A key part of the College's bullying prevention and intervention strategy is to encourage reporting of bullying incidents as well as providing support and assurance to students who experience bullying (and parents/guardians) that:

    - bullying is not tolerated within the College

    - their concerns will be taken seriously

    - the College has a clear strategy for dealing with bullying issues.

34. Bullying incidents can be advised to the College verbally (or in writing) through any of the following avenues:

    - informing a trusted teacher

    - informing the College Counsellor

    - informing a student's Head of Year/Year Patron

    - informing the Head of Junior School, Head of Senior School or the Principal

Complaints to the eSafety Commissioner About Cyberbullying Material Targeted at a Child

35. Where Cyberbullying Material is targeted at a child under the age of 18 years, a complaint can be made to:

    - the provider of a social media service, relevant electronic service, or designated internet service (as defined in the Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth)) -see The eSafety Guide for information about providers

    - the eSafety Commissioner under section 30 of the Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth).

36. Complaints to the eSafety Commissioner can be made through the online portal by the child, their parent or guardian, or an adult authorised by the child to make the complaint. The eSafety Commissioner has the power to investigate the complaint and to issue a removal notice.

Responding to Bullying

37. Bullying behaviours vary enormously in their extent and intent and, as a consequence, each incident needs to be dealt with on its facts.

38. In all circumstances the College:

- takes allegations of bullying incidents seriously

- will properly investigate the facts including discussing the incident with the student making the allegation, the student who was alleged to bully and any bystanders

- will conduct an impartial investigation into any allegation taking into account, and listening to all parties involved

- takes seriously, and monitors single incidents of conflict or fights between students, that do not ordinarily amount to bullying, for signs of ongoing behaviour, which may be an indicator of bullying

- provides assurance to the student being bullied that they are not at fault and their confidentiality will be respected as far as practicable

- ensures that teachers, wellbeing and College leadership staff support the student being bullied through the reporting process and the corresponding investigation and resolution processes

- ensures that student leaders support the College's anti-bullying policy and promote anti-bullying behaviours

- keeps parents and guardians of all students involved informed of the situation as and when appropriate to do so

- maintains records of reported bullying incidents

- will escalate its response when dealing with students who enact bullying behaviour for a second time and/or for severe incidents, even if these are not necessarily repetitive

- considers whether the behaviour gives rise to concerns that the student exhibiting the behaviour and/or the student subject to the behaviour may be experiencing child abuse or other harm, and, if so, follows the College's [Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policy](#).

- notification of or consultation with parents/guardians offering counselling to students who persistently bully or students who are persistently bullied

- implementing effective follow-up strategies

- disciplinary action, at the Principal's discretion, including suspension and expulsion of students who persistently bully, or in cases of severe incidents.

Staff Responsibilities

39. At PLC Armidale, staff are responsible for teaching various anti-bullying programs which may be in place from time to time by tailoring the content and strategies to address the specific needs and challenges faced by students at each educational level.

40. At PLC Sydney, the chaplains are responsible for teaching the Peacewise framework.

41. At PLC Sydney, the Head of Positive Student Care and Engagement and the Head of wellbeing in the Junior School are responsible for ensuring staff PD on the "Respect for Others' ' document and Peacewise principles are regularly included. PD is recorded by the Head of Learning and Teaching.

42. All staff are responsible for:

- supporting this policy

- modelling appropriate behaviour at all times

- dealing with all reported and observed incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy and procedure

- ensuring that any incident of bullying that they observe or is reported to them, is recorded appropriately

- monitoring the wellbeing of students that have been bullied

- considering whether the behaviour gives rise to concerns that the student exhibiting the behaviour and/or the student subject to the behaviour may be experiencing child abuse or other harm, and, if so, follows the Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policy.

- acknowledging the right of parents/carers to speak with the College if they believe their child is being bullied.

Related Documents

Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedure
Student Discipline Policy and Procedure
Respect for Others

References

Hans Georg Gadamer, 2004, *Truth and Method*, Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.

Rene Girard, 1987, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World,* Stanford University Press.

Rene Girard, 2001, "The Scapegoat", Complete 5-part CBC 'Ideas' series with David Cayley.

Miroslav Volf, 2019, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* - Abingdon Press.