St. Mary’s Anti-Bullying Policy
ST MARY’S CATHOLIC SCHOOL

ANTI BULLYING AND HARRASSMENT POLICY

MISSION STATEMENT
St Mary’s is a dynamic Catholic School Community that promotes excellence and empowers individuals, as we live the Gospel Values.

OUR SCHOOL VISION
St Mary’s is a school:

Where our Catholic Identity is visible and encourages a passionate response to the needs of contemporary society.

Where the learning and teaching is an exemplar of Catholic Education; challenging and innovative, embracing the uniqueness of individuals as life long learners, in a global and ever changing world.

That provides a safe and secure environment that nurtures each child’s potential and wellbeing, with an appreciation and active response to the voice of every child.

That values and respects the partnerships of parents, parish and wider community in building positive relationships that promote faith, learning and optimism.

St Mary’s is a community that embraces change and inspires hope and a positive vision for the school. It is a welcoming environment of mutual respect, trust and support.

OUR MOTTO
Semper Fidelis “Always Faithful”
Rationale

Consistent with the values and vision of St Mary’s School, we strive to reinforce positive behavior that reflects our Christian values and the good news of the Gospel. Bullying and harassment are the antithesis of these values and St. Mary’s School will not tolerate bullying and harassment in any form. The entire community; students, staff and parents, have the right to feel safe and free from bullying and harassment at all times.

St Mary’s recognises that various forms of bullying and harassment can occur both in and out of school, and that bullying and harassment can have devastating consequences for individuals affected by it. This Policy sets out the practical approach and process that will be taken by the School in response to allegations of bullying.

This Policy also acknowledges the increasing awareness of, and commitment by, the broader community to recognise bullying as a serious issue in our society. The following document is supported by Building Respectful and Safe Schools which supports schools in preventing and responding to bullying and all forms of unacceptable behaviour including harassment, discrimination or violence. Some of the definitions below are adapted from Bullying. No Way!, the joint Australian Education Authorities website, developed by Australia’s educational communities including the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Aims of Policy

- To create a safe and supportive environment for students, staff and parents of St Mary’s and the broader community.
- To nurture the development of the St Mary’s students into strong compassionate adults who also demonstrate a zero tolerance approach to bullying.
- To role model and encourage positive behaviour.
- To reinforce that bullying and harassment are unacceptable in all forms.
- To recognise the harmful effects of bullying on the victim and community and to provide education and support services for all.
- To publicly acknowledge the seriousness of bullying, and to commit to a zero tolerance approach to bullying behaviour.
- To provide confidential protocols and procedures for reporting, investigation, intervention, restoration and follow up of bullying incidents.
What is Bullying and Harassment?

Bullying is when someone, or a group of people, deliberately upset or hurt another person or damage their property, reputation or social acceptance on more than one occasion. There is an imbalance of power in incidents of bullying due to age, size, status or other reasons.

Bullying may occur because of perceived differences such as culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability or disability, religion, body size and physical appearance, age or economic status. Bullying may be motivated by jealousy, distrust, fear, misunderstanding or lack of knowledge. It can continue over time, is often hidden from adults and will probably continue if no action is taken.

Bullying is any significant or repeated behaviour by an individual or group (including main aggressors, colluders and bystanders) that is physically or emotionally stressful, hurtful, threatening or demeaning and would be considered by a reasonable person to be an abuse of a person's right to feel safe.

It is often (but not always) a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated incident. It can be planned or spontaneous and usually involves an imbalance of power.

Behaviour that is bullying includes:

**Physical** - including unwanted and inappropriate physical contact such as hitting, pushing, touching, shoving, damaging personal property, invasion of personal space and any other action or communication intended to intimidate.

**Verbal** - including name calling, offensive language, verbal insults, putting people down either in their presence or behind their backs, spreading rumours, picking on people for any reason including race, gender, sexuality, beliefs, appearance, economic status or fashion choice.

**Visual** - including offensive notes, images, material, or gestures.

**Victimisation** - including stand over tactics, picking on others, threats to ‘get’ people, setting someone up, exclusion or intimidation, laughing at comments, misfortunes or mistakes and practical jokes.

**Exclusion** - by a pattern of behaviour that purposely leaves someone out of activities including turning away, ignoring or changing seats.
**Harassment** - Harassment is behaviour intended to annoy, disturb, threaten or upset another person. Harassment and bullying may involve similar behaviours as both usually involve a person or group of people who have, or are perceived to have, more power deliberately upsetting someone on more than one occasion. Harassment may also occur because of perceived differences such as culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or religion.

Sexual harassment is unlawful behaviour under the *Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984* and the *Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995*. It occurs when a person engages in any unwelcome or unreciprocated conduct of a sexual nature (written or verbal), in circumstances which could reasonably be expected to cause offence, humiliation or intimidation.

**Discrimination** - Discrimination is treating a person or group less fairly or well because of a particular characteristic such as culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability or disability, religion, body size and physical appearance, age, or marital, parenting, or economic status. Discrimination commonly involves exclusion or rejection.

**Electronic and Written** - including use of the computer, electronic mail, text message, or telephone to disrupt, defame, harass, intimidate, insult, threaten or stalk users through written or spoken information in any form of social media and digital communication such as facebook, myspace and chat rooms. Please refer to Cyber-Safety Policy.

**What bullying is not**

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

- **Mutual conflict**: involves an argument or disagreement between people but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution. 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. If someone is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied. Nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different people is not the same as bullying. However, this does not mean that single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression should be ignored or condoned as these are unacceptable behaviours.
Implementation

The roles and responsibilities of students, staff and parents at St. Mary’s School are outlined below. It is the responsibility of these parties to be familiar with all components of this policy and follow the set guidelines.

Expectations of Staff

- Know your students and encourage connectedness to school by involvement in it, through positive relationships with peers and teachers, class work, leadership, sport, or any other activity.
- Be role models in word and action at all times
- Educate and reinforce positive behaviours and Restorative Practices with students on a regular basis
- Recognise that bullying and harassment is unacceptable and attempt to act upon every situation as effectively and efficiently as possible
- Encourage students to report bullying and harassment
- Become aware and report prime bullying locations & supervise these when on yard duty.
- Respond immediately to all forms of bullying and harassment of children by peers
- Promptly investigate reports of bullying and harassment and address the issues with all concerned
- Monitor and track the on-going effectiveness of action following the fourteen step process
- Inform parents and the Student Wellbeing Coordinator of any concerns about bullying
- Be open to parents who wish to discuss bullying with you

Expectations of Students

- Report bullying to a staff member
- Don’t accept bullying of others and intervene when necessary
- Be assertive and let the bully know in a strong voice that their actions are not appreciated.
Expectations of Parent / caregiver

- Role model positive behavior in your own behavior and relationships, using non bullying strategies and styles
- Listen, really listen to your son / daughter.
- Encourage your child to tell their teacher if they are being bullied.
- Inform the classroom teacher in writing if your child is unable to.
- Be willing to meet and discuss with teachers to resolve bullying issues.
- Take the Action Sheet seriously by discussing the content with your child, sign and return to school.
- Educate your child on how to deal with bullies appropriately and what constitutes appropriate behaviour in our society.

- **Watch for the signs of distress.** These could include:

**Emotional**
- Personality changes
- Mood swings
- Disturbed sleep
- Signs of depression
- Low self-esteem

**Behavioural**
- Truancy
- School refusal/reluctance
- Misbehaviour in class
- Change in routines to & from school

**Physical**
- Nervous tics
- Cowed body language
- Self harm, bruising
- Torn clothes

**Home**
- Bullying/ taunting of siblings
- Withdrawn or aggressive behaviour towards parents
- Requests for extra money
- ‘Losing’ things

**Social**
- Withdrawal from family & friends
- Reluctance to join activities

**Academic**
- Decline in work output,
- Decline in performance standards and attitudes

Loss of appetite
Feelings of guilt – believing you deserve to be bullied
Psychosomatic symptoms e.g.: headaches, stomach aches
Investigation and Follow Up Procedures
When an alleged bullying and/or harassment incident has been identified by a staff member, the staff member will immediately take action with the student/s involved according to the investigation process set out below. If the staff member has classroom responsibilities, school leadership personnel will release the staff member to investigate. The teacher that witnessed, was reported to, or was at the scene of the bullying, is usually the best to deal initially with the incident. All incidences need to be reported to the class teacher, the Leader of Well-being and the principal. All incidents and meetings with students and parents will be recorded in the St Mary’s Incident book.

Confidentiality
Importantly, the investigation process is confidential, and students, staff and parents are asked to commit to a culture of confidentiality around the process. It is important that people do not spread rumors or gossip about alleged bullying outside the formal investigation process. This can lead to misinformation, and false rumors about particular students, staff or parents.

Step One: Interview the victim/victims to clarify what has occurred. Provide sufficient opportunity for response and explanation

Step Two: Interview the alleged bully/bullies to clarify what has occurred. Provide sufficient opportunity for response and explanation

Step Three: Interview other students or teachers if necessary, to confirm or further clarify the facts (note the importance of confidentiality as mentioned above)

Step Four: Once obtaining sufficient information (which may involve discussions with others), the staff member needs to form a view about whether bullying or harassment has occurred.

(a) No bullying or harassment established
If the staff member's view, is that no bullying or harassment has occurred, the staff member should, nonetheless speak to all parties and address any behavioural issues. The staff member should inform the classroom teacher, Leader of Wellbeing, the Principal and if appropriate, the parents of the children involved, that an incident was reported and has been investigated. Details of the incident are to be recorded in the ‘Incident Book’.
(b) Bullying established  
If the staff member’s view is that bullying or harassment has occurred, the following steps will be taken.

**Step Five:** The staff member should inform the class teacher, Leader of Wellbeing and the Principal, that he or she believes bullying or harassment has occurred.

**Step Six:** The Principal, Leader of Wellbeing or Staff Member will inform the parents of the victim/victims, that an incident was reported and is being investigated, with the view that bullying or harassment has occurred, and the school will implement a process, in which parents will be involved, to deal with and address the behaviour. Provision for a parent meeting with the school will be available at any stage of the process.

**Step Seven:** The Principal, Leader of Wellbeing or Staff Member, will inform the parents of the bully/bullies and children involved, that an incident was reported and is being investigated, with the view that bullying or harassment has occurred, and the school will implement a process, in which parents will be involved, to deal with and address the behaviour. Provision for a parent meeting with the school will be available at any stage of the process.

**Step Eight:** The Principal, Leader of Wellbeing or Staff Member, will have a session with the child/children involved in the bullying or harassment. They will discuss the behaviour, the impact of their behaviour, why the behaviour is unacceptable and why the behavior must cease. If appropriate, the student will complete an Action/Think Sheet, as a means of the student taking ownership of the action they need to take to rectify the situation. This will include an apology to the victim and other appropriate actions to restore the situation. The investigating staff members, are responsible for ensuring that the Action Sheet clearly and accurately describes the situation that occurred, including the agreed actions to address the behaviour, before signing it as an accurate record. The action sheet should also be signed by the principal or Leader of Wellbeing.

**Step Nine:** The parents of the victim/victims will be notified of the contents of the Action Sheet prior to it being sent home to the parents of both Victim and Bully. Parents will be invited to discuss and have the opportunity for input into the course of action.

**Step Ten:** The parents of the bully/bullies will be notified of the contents of the Action Sheet prior to it being sent home to the parents of both Victim and Bully. Parents will be invited to discuss and have the opportunity for input into the course of action.

**Step Eleven:** A copy of the Action Sheet will then be sent home to both the parents of victim/victims and bully/bullies
Step Twelve: The Action sheet will be returned to the initiating staff member who will check parent signature and comments. The Action sheet will then be filed in the student's files of both bully and victim.

Step Thirteen: Actions put into place. A phone call or letter from the Principal, Leader of Wellbeing or Staff Member, will be sent to the parents of the victim/victims and bully/bullies, advising them of the outcomes of the process. Parents will be given an opportunity for a follow up meeting with the school.

Step Fourteen: There will be careful monitoring and following up of students involved in the incident. If bullying or harassing behaviour persists, a further parent meeting will be convened. If necessary, parents will be referred to external agencies for assistance. Appropriate measures will be taken at a school level eg restorative actions, internal suspension, withdrawal of privileges, time out at recess and lunch, or other consequences has deemed appropriate.

This Policy was ratified by the School and Parish Education Advisory Board and will be reviewed in 2014.