STUDENT BULLYING: PREVENTION AND RESPONSE POLICY

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STATEMENT OF POLICY

This policy outlines the expectations and obligations of systemic Catholic schools in the Townsville Diocese to prevent and respond to bullying involving children and students. It applies to all student bullying behaviour, including cyberbullying, that may occur in schools, at off-school premises and outside of school hours where there is a clear and close relationship between the school and the conduct of the student.

INTRODUCTION

The Diocesan Education Council (DEC) acknowledges student bullying can be present in any relationships within the community, and that it is essential that all school communities have continuing education so that their members can recognise bullying in its varied forms (both overt and covert). These student behaviours are a significant problem that must not be ignored. It is essential for our Catholic schools to act proactively to prevent and be diligent in responding to both overt and covert bullying behaviours of concern.

The national definition of bullying for Australian schools states:

> *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 conflicts or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying. (Bullying. No Way: A federal government anti-bullying resource)*

RATIONALE

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Townsville provide all students with opportunities to learn and develop positive behaviours and to exercise self-discipline in a safe, supportive environment. Mutually respectful relationships are essential to this safe and supportive environment. All members of the Catholic school community accept the responsibility to promote the development and maintenance of such an environment and to take direct initiatives to prevent bullying behaviour. The principles of

transparency, healing, forgiveness, and conversion are features of any process aimed at addressing bullying.

We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and, at the core of the Church's pastoral action is a deep respect for the innate dignity and uniqueness of the individual:

> *The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic School." (John Paul II in Address to the First National Meeting of the Catholic School in Italy, in "L'Osservatore Romano", 24 November 1991, p.4).*

It is important that all schools respond to bullying behaviours and that they ensure all students and staff feel safe in their school community.

All schools are legally obliged under federal, state and territory laws to prevent discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

POLICY DIRECTIVE

Systemic Catholic schools in the Townsville Diocese will create an understanding of what is acceptable behaviour for all students, and work with their school communities to affirm and strengthen their school community to:

- Recognise its duty to children and young people to provide a safe and positive learning environment where individual differences and diversity are respected and accepted.
- Commit to positive, proactive practices in support of student behaviour and wellbeing.
- Encourage the development of students' empathetic and compassionate responses to others.
- Foster respectful interpersonal relationships between all community members.
- Promote positive behaviour support as an integral part of all learning and teaching experiences, with a focus on teaching age-appropriate skills and strategies for recognising bullying and responding appropriately.
- Create an atmosphere where all members of the school community will feel comfortable to come forward to report incidents of bullying.
- Be future-focused and responsive to emerging trends in the area of bullying.

Schools will develop a process by which allegations or incidents of bullying will be addressed including opportunities for pastoral support, counselling and reconciliation for any of its students involved in bullying. Schools will develop a strategy by which all members of the school community will be informed about the nature of student bullying and harassment, and their schools processes. Allegations or incidents of bullying will be addressed at the earliest available opportunity to ensure the safety of all students.

If issues cannot be resolved at the school level they may be dealt with at the Townsville Catholic Education Office under the TCE Management of Complaints Procedure.

RELATED DOCUMENTS AND LEGISLATION

- DEC Inclusive Practices in Catholic Schools Policy
- DEC Student Behaviour and Pastoral Support Policy
- DEC Student Protection Policy
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld)
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)
- Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)