



Catholic Schools Office
Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

Pastoral Care Policy

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NOVEMBER 2002

DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE

POLICY STATEMENT

PASTORAL CARE

1. Rationale

The Catholic School endeavours to provide for each member participating – students, parents, staff, clergy and administrators – the experience of high quality interpersonal relationships of care and support. The bearing of burdens and the sharing of ‘joys and honour’ are not done for others but with others. Each member participates to some degree in pastoral care, just as each is a recipient of pastoral care.

A school’s discipline practice evolves from its Pastoral Care Policy insofar as each seeks to promote a respectful, secure and healthy environment in which students grow to be discerning self-disciplined and contributing members of society. However, occasionally, behaviours are exhibited that are disruptive to the teaching and learning process, show disregard for school code of discipline and conduct, and/or threaten safety. Such behaviour has consequences that affect the student, other students, their families, staff or the school itself.

A school’s response to a serious offence represents a critical test of its pastoral identity. A serious offence by a student challenges the school to be responsive to the rights, welfare and special needs of the perpetrator of an offence, and at the same time demonstrate a commitment to the welfare, rights and well being of all of its members.

The Pastoral Care Policy in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle is guided at school and system level by the following principles:

Pastoral Care:

- 1.1 Refers to the total care of students and all others in the school community.
- 1.2 Acknowledges that the responsibility of care is entrusted to all members of the school community.
- 1.3 Seeks, celebrates and affirms the giftedness within each person.
- 1.4 Recognises that quality relationships are fundamental to effective learning and genuine pastoral care.
- 1.5 Ensures correlation between the rhetoric of Gospel values and the reality as expressed in structures, procedures and practices.
- 1.6 At times, when the nature of the behaviour or action of a student is explicit, deliberate, and carried out with full knowledge, fairly strong consequences may be required. It is within this context that

3.1 Suspension

Suspension means a temporary withdrawal of a student's right to participation in and attendance at regular school activities. The length of time of suspension will vary depending on the nature of the incident and the purpose of the suspension.

It is a serious disciplinary measure and should only be used when other disciplinary measures have not produced a satisfactory outcome. The decision to suspend a student is to be made by the Principal or their delegated authority.

In normal circumstances suspension is subject to the following guidelines, however, it is recognised that on occasion an immediate suspension* may have to be imposed.

- That appropriate welfare strategies and discipline options have been applied and documented.
- That appropriate support personnel available within the school and system and externally have been involved.
- That discussion has occurred, prior to suspension, with the student and parent/caregiver regarding specific unacceptable behaviour.
- That records of all discussion and action have been taken.
- That appropriate communication processes are in place, including with the student and the student's parent/guardian.
- A student must not be sent home before the end of the school day until parent/s/guardian/s have been informed, and if necessary, agreement reached about arrangements for the collection of the student from school.

3.1.1 Immediate Suspension*

In some circumstances the Principal may determine that a student should be suspended immediately. This will usually be due to reasons such as

- (i) the safety of students or staff because of unacceptable behaviour, harassment, violence, or threats of violence
- (ii) the presence of knives and/or other weapons or
- (iii) the presence of illegal drugs.

Any student who is violent or threatens serious physical violence against another student or teacher or behaves in unacceptable ways, including any form of harassment against other students or teachers, is to be suspended immediately.

Any student who is in possession of a suspected illegal drug, is to be suspended immediately. Principals must contact their school Consultant to inform them of the incident and discuss with them whether the matter is serious enough to be reported to Police.

Any student who is in possession of a knife or threatening to use any item or instrument as a weapon, is to be suspended immediately. Principals must contact their school Consultant to inform them of the incident and discuss with them whether the matter is serious enough to be reported to Police.

3.1.2 Short Suspension

Short Suspension may be served by the student at school during school hours (*internal suspension*) or out of school (*external suspension*). A Principal may impose a short suspension of up to and including four (4) school days.

(i) *Short Internal Suspension*

- The Principal or their delegated authority may suspend a student, in accordance with the school's Pastoral Care Procedures.
- If suspension is served internally, then the student must attend school, but be withdrawn from all normal classes and other usual daily activities.

(ii) *Short External Suspension*

- The Principal or their delegated authority may suspend a student, in accordance with the school's Pastoral Care Procedures.
- A meeting to resolve the suspension, with the student and parent/caregiver, must be convened by the Principal or their delegated authority at the earliest opportunity. Parents have the right to a support person acceptable to both Principal and parent (eg. Aboriginal Education Worker, Special Education Adviser, Counsellor). Students should not be interviewed alone in relation to suspension issues.
- Where possible, a Principal or delegated authority must have a support person present during all meetings.
- During this meeting, appropriate pastoral care strategies will be discussed to assist the student. These may include the development of a contract indicating expectations regarding the student's behaviour, specific scheduling or timetabling, and monitoring of student behaviour. The consequences of continued unacceptable behaviour needs to be determined and clearly communicated to student and parents.
- If the unacceptable behaviour persists after two short suspensions, a longer suspension must be considered.
- The details of the suspension must be recorded with all relevant documentation retained on file at the school.
- Record keeping and access will be consistent with the Catholic Schools Office *Privacy Policy 2001* and *School Records – Keeping & Maintaining Policy 2002*.

3.1.3 Long Suspension

- If short suspensions have not resolved the problem, or the misbehaviour is so serious as to warrant a long suspension, the Principal may impose a long suspension of up to and including twenty (20) school days. The school's Consultant must be advised of the suspension including its duration. Given the seriousness of long suspension, particular emphasis must be given to procedural fairness issues.
- A formal disciplinary interview must be held with the student prior to making the decision to suspend. Principals must ensure that the student knows what the suspension is for, and that the student has an appropriate person present at the interview. The main issues of the interview must be recorded. Where a report from the school Counsellor is available, it may be used for this interview.

- A meeting to resolve the suspension, with the student and parent/caregiver, must be convened by the Principal at the earliest opportunity. Parents have the right to a support person acceptable to both Principal and parent (eg. Aboriginal Education Worker, Special Education Adviser, Counsellor).
- Where possible, a Principal must have a support person present during all meetings.
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- (ii) If parents/caregivers are unable or unwilling to attend a meeting, the Principal should consider the individual merits of the case and attempt to ensure that the student is back at school on or before the concluding date of the suspension period.
- (iii) All meetings and interviews are to be recorded with the documentation retained on file at the school.

3.2 Expulsion

Expulsion means total exclusion of a student from attendance at the school of enrolment within the diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Expulsion is an extreme disciplinary step reserved for cases of gross misconduct, extremely grave breaches of school rules and behaviour that is persistently disruptive and/or dangerous.

In normal circumstances expulsion is subject to the following guidelines, however, it is recognised that, in very limited circumstances of the most serious kind, an immediate expulsion may have to be imposed.

Expulsion is a sanction to be applied as a last resort when other disciplinary measures, including suspension, have not produced a satisfactory outcome. In deciding to expel a student, careful consideration must be given to the welfare of the student and to the overall good and/or safety of the school community.

The Principal should ensure, except as a result of a most serious incident, that all appropriate welfare strategies and discipline options have been implemented and documented, prior to expelling a student from the school because of misbehaviour.

Prior to making a decision to expel, the student must receive at least one formal written warning that such action is being considered.

3.2.1 Deciding on and Notifying an Expulsion

3.2.1.1 Decision

- (i) The decision to expel must only be made by the Principal.
- (ii) The Principal must inform the student and the school's Consultant of the precise grounds on which expulsion is being recommended.
- (iii) The student must be given the opportunity to respond. The student's response must be considered before a decision to expel is made.
- (iv) Prior to a decision being made to expel a student, the Principal must seek advice from relevant and appropriate personnel, eg. Parish Priest of the student, school's Counsellor, school's Consultant.
- (v) If the student is under 15 years of age, the Principal will explore enrolment alternatives with the school's Consultant prior to finalising the expulsion.

3.2.1.2 Notification

Having reached a decision to expel a student from the school, the following steps must be put in place:

- (i) A student will not be sent out of the school before the end of the school day without notification being made to the parent/caregiver, and if necessary, agreement reached about arrangements for the collection of the student from school.
- (ii) Notification of expulsion must be made to parents/caregivers in writing. In all cases, the notification must include:

- Notice of the expulsion. This formal advice should also state the student's/parents' right to appeal the decision and the appropriate procedures for submitting an appeal.
 - The reasons for the expulsion.
- (iii) The Principal must inform relevant/appropriate staff, the school's Consultant and where warranted, the student's Parish Priest.
- (iv) The Principal should assist the student to find suitable alternative placement in another Catholic school if appropriate, particularly where the student is under 15 years of age.
- (v) Documentation of all steps involved and record of any interview/correspondence must be completed.
- (vi) Having completed the action outlined above, the Principal must forward a copy of all documentation related to the incident and subsequent expulsion to the Director of Schools, Catholic Schools Office.

4. Evaluation

4.1 This Pastoral Care Policy will be evaluated at regular intervals. Components of this review may include strengths, positive aspects and needs in areas of:

- 4.1.1 Relationships
- 4.1.2 Pastoral programmes
- 4.1.3 Structures, policies, procedures and practices
- 4.1.4 Teaching and learning programmes and strategies
- 4.1.5 Approaches to discipline
- 4.1.6 Self-discipline, rights and responsibilities
- 4.1.7 Supportive family/school relationships
- 4.1.8 Use of networks of care at school, parish, diocesan and community levels.

4.2 The evaluative process for the Diocesan Pastoral Care Policy will involve various sections of the entire Diocesan community.

Policy Statement – Pastoral Care

Support Material

1. Definition of Serious Offence
2. Use of Corporal Punishment
3. Sample Letters
4. Right of Appeal
5. Procedural Fairness
6. Procedures for Responding to a Complaint about Bullying
7. Bullying – Information for Parents
8. Use with Other Policies
9. Additional Information for Principals
10. Resources

1. Definition of Serious Offence

The Catholic Schools Office proposes that serious offence should be defined as activity or behaviour that:

- seriously undermines the ethos of the Catholic school; or
- consistently and deliberately fails to comply with any lawful order of a Principal or teacher; or
- is offensive, or dangerous, to the physical and/or emotional health of any staff member or student; or
- consistently and deliberately interferes with the educational opportunities of other students.

NOTE:

Some serious offences are by their nature criminal offences. Schools are obliged to observe legal requirements in such cases. For further information and guidance, refer to:

- Child Protection:
 - Policy, (1999)
 - Guidelines & Procedures for the Notification of Child Abuse – Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle (1999-2000)
 - Summary of Diocesan Guidelines (1999)
 - Ombudsman Amendment (Child Protection & Community Services) Act 1998 – Guidelines for Implementation (2000).

2. Use of Corporal Punishment

The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle declares that corporal punishment is inappropriate within the Catholic school and must not be used. *(Refer to Education Reform Act (School Discipline) Act, 1995.*

4. Right of Appeal Process

Students and parents/caregivers who consider that correct procedures have not been followed, or that an unfair decision has been made, may appeal.

- The student's parents have a right to appeal against a notification of expulsion within five (5) working days of the action.
- This appeal is made in writing to the Director of Schools stating the grounds on which the appeal is being made.
- In hearing an appeal, the Director of Schools will be assisted by a Principal and a school Counsellor.
- Following an unsuccessful appeal, the student's parents have the right of appeal to the Bishop, Maitland-Newcastle Diocese, within thirty days. The Bishop or his appointee may appoint an appropriate person to hear appeals.

6. Procedures for Responding to a Complaint about Bullying

Preamble

Bullying is not acceptable. Bullying can impact on the capacity of children to achieve their God given potential. Bullying is not a normal part of growing up and it is not a part of any 'toughening up process' that a child has to go through. Bullying can seriously harm a child physically and emotionally.

The Catholic Schools Office is committed to supporting schools in continuing to develop positive, supportive, physically and psychologically safe schools.

Definitions

Bullying is repeated and systematic attacks on others. It often occurs where there is a power imbalance. It can include psychological as well as physical attack, teasing and exclusion from the peer group. Although bullying may often be invisible to adults, it is very visible to children.

Bullying differs from harassment in terms of occurrence; harassment can occur as a single incident whereas bullying is characterised by repeated attacks.

A student is being bullied or victimised when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. (Olweus, 1993)

Bullying involves a desire to hurt + hurtful action + a power imbalance + (typically) repetition + an unjust use of power + evident enjoyment by the aggressor and a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim. (Rigby, 2002)

Action Hierarchy

The four recommended processes in managing a complaint about bullying are:

Reporting: Acknowledging the Issues

- Listen supportively to the complaint
- Refer to designated person (eg. Class teacher, executive teacher, contact and referral officer)
- Do not at this stage commit to any action.

Response: Getting it straight and addressing the issues

- Investigate complaint; take statements from parties and witnesses
- Interview parties individually
- If determined as appropriate, contact (preferably by telephone) parents/caregivers
- For bully, for example and a determined as appropriate:
 - Social skills training, time-out, punishment, levels of sanction, withdrawal of privileges, counselling suspension, police referral
- For victim, for example and if determined as appropriate:
 - Counselling, social skills training, better ways of dealing with an attack
- Consider ecological changes (for example, extra supervision, different lunch-times, structured activities during playground time).

Repair: Encouraging the Healing Process

Initiate a repair process with emphasis on restitution and the building of skills consistent with the Diocesan and school Pastoral care Policies. Repair processes need to support both the victim and the bully.

Suggested programs include:

Repair Conference
Stop-Think-Do
Rock and Water
Mentoring
Resourceful Adolescent Program
Building Safe Schools
Beyond Bullying
Resilient Kids
Creative Times
Peer Mediation
Bullybusters
P.E.A.C.E. Pak

Suggested Support Services include:

St John of God Family Services
Centacare
Community Health
Relationships Australia
Unifam
Creative Times (Samaritans)

The *St Laurence Centre* is available to support schools in implementing many of these suggested programs and also in referral to other agencies.

Useful websites:

www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/

What are the behaviours? They are both physical and psychological:

- Ongoing physical violence and attacks (often boys)
- Verbal taunts, name calling and put-downs
- Threats and intimidation
- Extortion or stealing of money and possessions
- Exclusion from the peer group (often girls)

When investigating bullying, be aware that bullying is not:

- Developmentally appropriate rough and tumble play including verbal games
- A one-off fight or an isolated incident of teasing
- Playful teasing
- An action of criminal behaviour such as assault with a weapon, grievous bodily harm, a serious threat to cause harm, theft or sexual assault.

7. Bullying – Information for Parents

Bullying is ongoing aggression by a child or a group of children against other children. It can be done with words or actions. Bullying can include threatening, teasing, preventing others from going where they want to or doing what they want to, pushing or hitting.

Bullying is not just a problem for the victim; it is also a problem for the people who know it is happening, e.g. the school. A very competitive school environment can contribute to bullying. Schools have a responsibility to make children feel safe.

Bullying should not happen to children. If bullying is allowed to continue it can have a very bad effect on the child who is being bullied. If the children are allowed to go on bullying they are more likely to grow up to bully or hit their partners and their own children. Being bullied is very distressing for the victim and needs to be dealt with.

Children who are bullied

Children who bully sometimes pick on just anyone, and sometimes choose other children who seem to be easy to hurt. They may pick on children who:

- look or are different in some way
- are stressed, either at home or at school
- have a disability
- struggle with schoolwork
- are not good at sport
- lack social confidence
- are anxious
- are unable to hold their own because of being smaller or weaker or younger.

Occasionally children provoke other children to bully them by teasing first.

Signs of being bullied

Children who are being bullied may not always tell adults. They may be afraid or ashamed. Some signs of being bullied may be:

- not wanting to go to school
- finding excuses for not going to school, e.g. feeling sick
- wanting to go to school a different way to avoid the children who are bullying them
- being very tense, tearful and unhappy after school
- talking about hating school
- bruises or scratches
- talking about not having any friends
- refusing to tell you about what happens at school.

Your child may show other signs of unhappiness as well, e.g. problems with sleeping. These signs may not necessarily mean being bullied but you need to check out what is worrying your child.

What parents can do

- Listen to your child and take his/her feelings and fears seriously.
- Try not to take everything into your own hands, unless it is absolutely necessary, because this is likely to make your child feel less in control.

- Help your child to work out what ideas he/she has about coping with the problem. Write them down. Include a few of your own if needed to get started. Then talk with your child about which ones might help or not help and why. Choose an idea that he/she would like to try and then check out how it works.
- Don't call your child names, e.g. "weak" or "a sook" and don't let anyone else do so.
- If the bullying is verbal teasing you may be able to help your child to learn to ignore it, so the child who is doing it does not get any satisfaction out of it. You could practise at home ways to help your child gain confidence, e.g. the way to walk past with their head up.
- Help your child think of ways to avoid the situation, e.g., by going a different way home, or staying with a group.
- Some children are helped by imagining a special wall around them that protects them so that the hard words bounce off.
- Work on building your child's confidence in things he/she does well.

NB - Be very careful that your child does not feel that being bullied is their fault.

Talking to the school

When bullying happens it is often at school and you will need to talk to the school about it.

- Make a list of the things that have happened to your child. Be clear and be firm about his/her suffering. Be prepared to name the children who bully. If bullying persists, write down WHO, WHAT, WHERE and WHEN.
- Talk to the school Principal about the school's way of dealing with bullying and what steps they take to prevent it and protect children from it.
- Talk to the teacher about what can be done to help your child. Keep in contact until the problem is sorted out.
- If you find it difficult to go to the school and ask about this, it might help to take a friend with you.

Special note

It is important to get professional support if:

- this is an ongoing problem rather than an occasional one for your child
- it happens to your child a lot, in different situations and with different children.

Reminders

- Let your child know that bullying is wrong.
- Take your child's fears and feelings seriously.
- Reassure your child that being bullied is not his/her fault, and that something can be done about it.
- Let your child know that he/she is not the only one who is bullied. It happens to lots of children.
- Help your child as far as possible to work out his own ways of dealing with the problem.
- Don't allow the bullying to continue.
- Protect your child – involve the school wherever it is happening.
- Help your child to feel good about the other things in his/her life.

8. Use with Other Policies

The Pastoral Care Policy should be read in conjunction with existing documents issued by the Catholic Schools Office such as:

- Procedures to be followed Where a Problem Arises with Respect to a Teacher's Performance of Professional Duties (1993)
- The Education of Gifted & Talented Students in Primary Schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle (December 1995)
- The Education of Gifted & Talented Students in Secondary Schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle (December 1995)
- Enrolment Policy for Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle (2003)
- Diocesan documentation regarding Students with Special Needs
- Developing Inclusive Schools (1997)
- Child Protection:
 - Policy, (1999)
 - Guidelines & Procedures for the Notification of Child Abuse – Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle (1999-2000)
 - Summary of Diocesan Guidelines (1999)
 - Ombudsman Amendment (Child Protection & Community Services) Act 1998 – Guidelines for Implementation (2000).
- Guidelines for dealing with Suicide, Death of Student, Teacher, Parent are currently being developed
- Addressing Harassment in the Workplace 2002
- Additionally, reference to the following appropriate:
 - Education Reform Act NSW
 - Education Reform Amendment (School Discipline) Act
 - Disability Discrimination Act
 - Anti-Discrimination (Amendment) Act