

**Help for non-English speakers**

If you need help to understand this policy, please contact the school Social Worker on 9097 2000

PURPOSE

Western Autistic School is committed to providing a safe and respectful learning environment where bullying will not be tolerated.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- explain the definition of bullying so that there is shared understanding amongst all members of the Western Autistic School community.
- make clear that no form of bullying at Western Autistic School will be tolerated.
- outline the strategies and programs in place at Western Autistic School to build a positive school culture and prevent bullying behaviour.
- ask that everyone in our school community be alert to signs and evidence of bullying behaviour and understands the importance of reporting bullying behaviour to school staff.
- ensure that all reported incidents of bullying are appropriately investigated and addressed.
- ensure that support is provided to students who may be affected by bullying behaviour (including targets, bystanders, witnesses, and students engaging in bullying behaviour).
- seek parental and peer group support in addressing and preventing bullying behaviour at Western Autistic School.

When responding to bullying behaviour, Western Autistic School aims to:

- be proportionate, consistent, and responsive.
- find a constructive solution for everyone.
- stop the bullying from happening again.
- restore the relationships between the students involved.

Western Autistic School acknowledges that school staff owe a duty of care to students to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm, which can include harm that may be caused by bullying behaviour.

SCOPE

This policy addresses how Western Autistic School aims to prevent, address, and respond to student bullying behaviour. Western Autistic School recognises that there are many other types of inappropriate student behaviours that do not meet the definition of bullying which are also unacceptable at our school. These other inappropriate behaviours will be managed in accordance with our Student Wellbeing and Engagement and Inclusion and Diversity policies.

This policy applies to all school activities, including camps and excursions. It also applies to bullying behaviour between students that occurs outside of school hours, where the behaviour impacts on student wellbeing and safety at school.

POLICY**Definitions****Bullying**

In 2018 the Education Council of the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the following definition of bullying for use by all Australian schools:

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 conflict or fight between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

Bullying has three main features:

- It involves a misuse of power in a relationship.
- It is ongoing and repeated, and
- It involves behaviours that can cause harm.

Bullying can be:

Direct physical bullying: this form includes hitting, tripping, and pushing or damaging property.

Direct verbal bullying: this form includes name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse.

Indirect bullying: this form of bullying is designed to harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation. Indirect bullying includes lying and spreading rumours, mimicking, playing nasty jokes to embarrass or humiliate, and encouraging others to socially exclude someone.

There are four main types of bullying behaviour:

- physical – examples include hitting, pushing, shoving, or intimidating or otherwise physically hurting another person, damaging, or stealing their belongings. It includes threats of violence.
- verbal/written – examples include name-calling or insulting someone about an attribute, quality, or personal characteristic. Racial discrimination of any kind is a form of bullying.
- social (sometimes called relational or emotional bullying) – examples include deliberately excluding someone, spreading rumours, sharing information that will have a harmful effect on the other person and/or damaging a person's social reputation or social acceptance.

- cyberbullying – any form of bullying behaviour that occurs online or via a mobile device. It can be verbal or written, and can include threats of violence as well as images, videos and/or audio.

Bullying can be a form of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or other type of social prejudice when the behaviour is targeted at an individual or group because of a personal characteristic, such as race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.

For further information about bullying, refer to: [Bully Stoppers \(education.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au) and the Department's [Bullying Prevention and Response](#) policy on the Policy and Advisory Library.

Other distressing and inappropriate behaviours

Many distressing and inappropriate behaviours may not constitute bullying even though they are unpleasant. Students who are involved in or who witness any distressing and inappropriate behaviours should report their concerns to school staff and our school will follow our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy and/or this Bullying Prevention Policy where the behaviour constitutes bullying.

Mutual conflict involves an argument or disagreement between people, but not an imbalance of power. In incidents of mutual conflict, generally, both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the issue. Unresolved mutual conflict can develop into bullying if one of the parties targets the other repeatedly in retaliation.

Social rejection or dislike Unless the social rejection is directed towards someone specifically and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others, it is not bullying.

Single episode acts of nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. However, single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression are not acceptable behaviours at our school and may have serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour. Western Autistic School will use its Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy to guide a response to single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression.

Harassment is language or actions that are demeaning, offensive or intimidating to a person. It can take many forms, including sexual harassment and disability harassment.

Discrimination is behaviour that treats someone unfavourably because of a personal characteristic (for example, race, religious belief or activity, disability, sex or intersex status, gender identity or sexual orientation).

Discrimination, harassment, and any other inappropriate behaviour is not tolerated at our school and there may be serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour. This includes any form of racism, religious or disability discrimination, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or any other behaviour that targets an individual or group. Further information about discrimination and harassment, including definitions, is set out in our Inclusion and Diversity Policy.

Bullying Prevention

Western Autistic School has a number of programs and strategies in place to build a positive and inclusive school culture and relationships to promote wellbeing. We strive to foster a school culture that prevents bullying behaviour by modelling, encouraging, and teaching behaviour that demonstrates acceptance, kindness, and respect.

Bullying prevention at Western Autistic School is proactive and is supported by research that indicates that a whole school, multifaceted approach is the most effect way to prevent and address bullying. At our school:

- we strive to build strong partnerships between the school, families and the broader community that means all members work together to ensure the safety of students.
- we are in the process of implementing the Respectful Relationships initiative, which aims to embed a culture of respect and equality across our school.
- we celebrate the diverse backgrounds of members of our school community and teach multicultural education, including Aboriginal History, to promote mutual respect and social cohesion.
- all staff strive to foster a safe environment that is supportive and inclusive of LGBTIQ+ students.
- teachers are encouraged to incorporate classroom management strategies that discourage bullying and promote positive behaviour.
- in the classroom, Personal and Social capability strand of the Victorian Curriculum teaches students what constitutes bullying and how to respond to bullying behaviour assertively. This promotes resilience, assertiveness, conflict resolution and problem solving.
- students are encouraged to look out for each other and to talk to teachers about any bullying they have experienced or witnessed.
- we will participate in the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence.

For further information about our engagement and wellbeing initiatives, please see our Student Wellbeing and Engagement policy.

Incident Response

Reporting concerns to Western Autistic School

Bullying is not tolerated at our school. We ensure bullying behaviour is identified and addressed with appropriate and proportionate consequences. All bullying complaints will be taken seriously and responded to sensitively.

Students who may be experiencing bullying behaviour, or students who have witnessed bullying behaviour, are encouraged to report their concerns to school staff or another trusted adult as soon as possible.

Our ability to effectively reduce and eliminate bullying behaviour is greatly affected by students and/or parents and carers reporting concerning behaviour as soon as possible, so that the responses implemented by Western Autistic School are timely and appropriate in the circumstances.

We encourage students to speak to a member of their teaching team including their classroom teacher or education support staff. However, students are welcome to discuss their concerns with any trusted member of staff including a member of the wellbeing team or school leadership.

Parents or carers who develop concerns that their child is involved in or has witnessed bullying behaviour at Western Autistic School should contact the Assistant Principal for Wellbeing on 9097 2000.

Investigations

When notified of alleged bullying behaviour, school staff are required to:

1. record the details of the allegations on Sentral and
2. inform the Principal or Assistant Principal for Wellbeing

The Assistant Principal for Wellbeing is responsible for investigating allegations of bullying in a timely and sensitive manner. To appropriately investigate an allegation of bullying, the Assistant Principal for Wellbeing may:

- speak to the those involved in the allegations, including the target/s, the students
- allegedly engaging in bullying behaviour/s and any witnesses to the incidents
- speak to the parent/carer(s) of the students involved
- speak to the teachers of the students involved
- take detailed notes of all discussions for future reference
- where appropriate, obtain written statements from all or any of the above

All communications with the Assistant Principal for Wellbeing while investigating an allegation of bullying will be managed sensitively. Investigations will be completed as quickly as possible to allow for the behaviours to be addressed in a timely manner.

The objective of completing a thorough investigation into the circumstances of alleged bullying behaviour is to determine the nature of the conduct and the students involved. A thorough understanding of the alleged bullying will inform staff about how to most effectively implement an appropriate response to that behaviour.

Serious bullying, including serious cyberbullying, is a criminal offence and may be referred to Victoria Police. For more information, see: [Brodie's Law](#).

Responses to bullying behaviours

When the Assistant Principal for Wellbeing has sufficient information to understand the circumstances of the alleged bullying and the students involved, a number of strategies may be implemented to address the behaviour and support affected students in consultation with the school Social Worker, teachers, Student Support Services (SSS), Principal and Department of Education and Training specialists.

There are several factors that will be considered when determining the most appropriate response to the behaviour. When deciding about how to respond to bullying behaviour, Western Autistic School will consider:

- the age, maturity and individual circumstances of the students involved
- the severity and frequency of the bullying, and the impact it has had on the target student
- whether the student/s engaging in bullying behaviour have displayed similar behaviour before
- whether the bullying took place in a group or one-to-one context
- whether the students engaging in bullying behaviour demonstrates insight or remorse for their behaviour
- the alleged motive of the behaviour, including any element of provocation

The Assistant Principal for Wellbeing may implement all, or some of the following responses to bullying behaviours:

- offer wellbeing support, including referral to the school Social Worker, SSS or an external provider to:
 - the target student or students
 - the students engaging in the bullying behaviour
 - affected students, including witnesses and/or friends of the target student

- if appropriate, facilitate a restorative practice meeting with all or some of the students involved. The objective of restorative practice is to repair relationships that have been damaged by bringing about a sense of remorse and restorative action on the part of the person who has bullied someone and forgiveness by the person who has been bullied
- if appropriate, facilitate a mediation between some or all of the students involved to help to encourage students to take responsibility for their behaviour and explore underlying reasons for conflict or grievance. Mediation is only suitable if all students are involved voluntarily and demonstrate a willingness to engage in the mediation process
- if appropriate, work with the school Social Worker to facilitate a process using the Support Group Method, involving the target student(s), the students engaging in bullying behaviour and a group of students who are likely to be supportive of the target(s)
- if appropriate, implement a Method of Shared Concern process with all students involved in the bullying
- facilitate a Student Support Group meeting and/or Behaviour Support Plan for affected students
- prepare an Individual Management Plan restricting contact between target and students engaging in bullying behaviour
- provide discussion and/or mentoring for different social and emotional learning competencies of the students involved
- monitor the behaviour of the students involved for an appropriate time and take follow up action if necessary
- implement proportionate disciplinary consequences for the students engaging in bullying behaviour, which may include removal of privileges, detention, suspension and/or expulsion consistent with out Student Wellbeing and Engagement policy, the Ministerial Order on Suspensions and Expulsions and any other relevant Department policy

Western Autistic School understands the importance of monitoring and following up on the progress of students who have been involved in or affected by bullying behaviour. Where appropriate, school staff will also endeavour to provide parents and carers with updates on the management of bullying incidents.

The Assistant Principal for Wellbeing is responsible for maintaining up to date records of the investigation of and responses to bullying behaviour.

COMMUNICATION

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- available publicly on our school's website
- included in staff induction processes
- discussed at staff briefings/meetings as required
- included as annual reference in school newsletter
- made available in hard copy from school administration upon request

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Statement of Values and School Philosophy
- Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
- Complaints policy
- Duty of Care Policy

- Inclusion and Diversity Policy

Our school also follows Department of Education and Training policy relating to bullying including:

- [Bullying Prevention and Response](#)
- [Cybersafety and Responsible Use of Digital Technologies](#)
- [Equal Opportunity and Human Rights - Students](#)
- [LGBTIQ Student Support Policy](#)

The following websites and resources provide useful information on prevention and responding to bullying, as well as supporting students who have been the target of bullying behaviours:

- [Bully Stoppers](#)
- [Report racism or religious discrimination in schools](#)
- [Kids Helpline](#)
- [Reach Out Australia](#)
- [Lifeline](#)
- [Bullying. No way!](#)
- [Student Wellbeing Hub](#)
- [eSafety Commissioner](#)
- [Australian Student Wellbeing Framework](#)

EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years, or earlier as required following an incident or analysis of new research or school data relating to bullying, to ensure that the policy remains up to date, practical and effective.

Data to inform this review will be collected through:

- regular staff surveys
- Attitudes to School Survey
- Parent Opinion Survey

Proposed amendments to this policy will be discussed with School Council and included in our school newsletter for parent and community feedback.

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	May 2023
Consultation	March 2023 Working Group May 2023 Working Group School Newsletter 12 th May 2023 Consultative Meeting 12 th May 2023
Approved by	Principal Adele Field
Next scheduled review date	May 2025