TOWARDS A WHOLE SCHOOL POLICY FRAMEWORK ON BULLYING

One of the biggest issues that schools face, and our society faces is BULLYING.

Our School Policy position is simple:-
“Donnybrook DHS is a school with a zero tolerance toward all bullying behaviours.”

So how does the school approach dealing with bullying behaviours?

We focus upon the learning around the behaviour that is unacceptable, in the same way as we deal with other unacceptable behaviours e.g., littering, stealing, rough play etc., and we deal with it appropriately in context.

Our school, like all good schools, embeds learning associated with behaviour in two main ways.

The first approach is part of the mandated social education mission, designed to give the student that wide set of skills that will enable them to cope with life and to be good citizens. Part of this learning involves explicit teaching around social and mental health and part is through applying the VALUES lens to the everyday context of the students’ lives. This is about reinforcing the “rightness” of behaviours and skilling with peers about how to avoid the ‘wrong’ behaviours.

The other approach schools have, which is also about learning, is in the Management of Behaviour. Here the learning focuses very explicitly on things like “CODIFICATION OF CONDUCT”, the setting of clear standards and expectations of behaviour, dealing with learning associated with the standards and expectations of behaviour, dealing with learning processes associated with standards and consequences of not meeting the standards.

Schools as learning organizations are structured around contexts or phases broadly defined as “The Early Years” (K-2), “The Middle Years” (3 -5), “Early Adolescence” (6 – 8) and “Middle and Late Adolescents” (9 – 12). Each context is different as the social learning environment changes, and the social learning is crafted to meet the changing needs. Typically each context builds on and relies on the earlier social learning, and in general terms the social skilling becomes more complex as the social environment gets more sophisticated. We all need to be aware that in the area of social learning some students are more successful learners than others.

Bullying, and learning how to deal with it, populates all the learning phases or contexts associated with schools and beyond school into adulthood.

This article is written with the whole school community as an audience, and is designed to explain our approach in the different learning contexts.
Also published with this article will be links to documents to assist the community to understand our approach and processes. There are also links to articles on particularly good current information designed to inform the community about the issues around “BULLYING”.

The school is clearly a player about that subject called “learning to behave appropriately” which obviously includes bullying. Our main role is about skilling kids as learners in this subject. We need people, including parents and the wider community who have similar roles to work with us to achieve the goal of “all students developing the skills and competencies associated with becoming resilient beings”.

Looking at the Bullying Policy Framework in site contexts – Mead Street.

The important understandings that our school community need to have about how bullying is dealt with at the Junior Campus are:
- Social learning, how to behave including behaviours associated with bullying, is a major emphasis across our teaching and learning programs, i.e., it is curriculum embedded.
- It also has a “behaviour management” dimension, which has “harder edges” but is still about learning.
- The whole aim of social learning in the early and middle years is to produce socially competent and resilient students able to cope with their social context, and to prepare for the next phase.

The Teaching and Learning Dimension at Mead Street

- Explicit teaching of social skills is a major agenda item in the day to day learning of all children across the early years.
- The focus is moving the individual social child into an awareness of how to function as part of smaller groups in play AND more structured settings like classrooms.
- The classroom staff, led by the teachers, combine to action this social learning agenda in both a structured and informal way.

The agendas include:
daily routine, organizational expectations for children, meeting standards (hygiene, work standards, behaviour standards etc.), understanding limits (space and physicality etc) ……..
As they learn and move from Kindy to Year 3 the standards “bar” is lifted as they gain more social competencies.
- Classroom practice across the Early and Middle Years typically embraces “Restorative Justice models” at the whole group level e.g., the “Circle Strategy” – teachers note areas of social learning focus, and organize the class to explore “the behaviour” not focus on individuals. The students typically make the judgement as to standards expected and this makes it clearer to the groups as a whole about standards expected.  e.g. An example of the “Circle Strategy” – class teacher on lunch duty notes a group of boys involved in “rough play”. After lunch the teacher runs a focused discussion on the issue of “rough play” with all the children participating. The intent is to reach argument on being physical but also being safe in play.
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Classroom teachers are supported by programs delivered by a specialist teacher, who deals with age contextual social, emotional and mental health issues. The combined efforts of the classroom teachers, staff and the specialist is about building the individual’s capacity to deal in their social world to be able to handle change and stress. This focus is about building a capacity we call resilience.

**Resilience – Definition**

A concept that proposes a current human need to weather periods of stress and change successfully throughout life.

The ability to weather each period of disruption and integration leaves the person better able to deal with the next change.

The specialist teacher of health in the early and middle years has a coherent and contextual program that builds the learning across social, emotional and mental health areas.

The specialist is also flexible to deal with ‘issues’ that may be current across classes and year groups.

The specialist sources learning from best practice programs like:-

- Kids Matter, Mind Matters, Bounceback, Choose Respect et al, AND also introduces from time to time other strategies sourced in other disciplines e.g., Yoga, Zumba, Massage and Meditation etc.

All opportunities are explored to build the most resilient child.

One of the major learning issues for students is that “it is OK to tell”. Teachers address this issue under the banner “the student has the right to feel safe and unthreatened at school”.

Michael Grose in his article “Bullying kids” clearly talks about the necessary partnerships between parents and schools in both “finding out” about the child being bullied and working together towards supportive solutions. Here is his take on “knowing or finding out” and “what to do if you suspect your child is being bullied”. *Source – Insights by Michael Grose, Article “Bully-proofing kids”.*

Knowing when kids are being bullied.

Some research suggest that around 20 percent of bullying goes unreported so it can be difficult spotting children who experience bullying. However, kids will usually show signs in three ways.

1. **Acting out:** outward signs such as displays of unusual aggression at home, talking about hating school and getting into trouble more often.
2. **Acting in:** subtle behaviour changes such as sullenness, withdrawing from usual activities, being uncommunicative, feigned illness, bed-wetting and altered sleep patterns.
3. **Telltale signs:** more obvious physical signs such as torn clothes, items missing, altered school routes and physical injuries.

Children who are bullied usually display a combination of signs. Children often find it hard to communicate that they are being bullied. Some don’t have the language required. Many kids feel ashamed, or even believe what bullies tell them. Sometimes kids are also reluctant to tell adults about bullying, as they fear that they will take the matter out of their hands, so your approach needs to be gentle and non-judgmental.
Here are six things to do if you suspect your child is being bullied:

1. **Listen to their story:** It really is important to stay calm and get the real story. Kids need to be believed when they are bullied, so make sure they get the chance to talk.

2. **Get the facts:** Bullying behaviour usually follows patterns. An accurate picture will help you determine your next course of action, for example, whether you need to give your child some avoidance or coping strategies or gain assistance from your child’s school.

3. **Recognise and validate their feelings (anger, fear and sadness are common):** Bullying always elicits strong feelings so make sure kids can share their thoughts and feelings with you.

4. **Give them some common coping skills and defence mechanisms:** Look for some simple ways to help them handle the bullying such as making sure they stay in pairs, practising a comeback line or even walking and talking confidently.

5. **Get the school involved:** If your child continues to struggle with bullying contact your child’s school. Resist the temptation to confront suspected bullies, or their families. Teachers generally have very practical, tried and true ways to tackle bullying.

6. **Help build your child’s support networks and their self-confidence:** Positive peer groups are great protective factors for kids when they are bullied so do all you can to encourage and build their friendship groups inside and outside school.

Our school has a commitment to act on all incidents around bullying. The issue for us often is we “don’t find out”, and as Grose suggests sometimes this is because of the victims fear or reluctance to tell.

Further “parenting tips” are available from Michael Grose and these are accessed thru the following links:-  
“Teen Bullying”
“Keeping Kids Safe in a cyber world”

Note:- We will add other links from Michael Grose later.

We need parents to help to find out and of recent times we have developed a focus on the “bystander” to accept some responsibility to tell or report about bullying.
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PRINCIPAL – Peter Fitzgerald

The Behaviour Management dimension of Learning at Mead Street

The Behaviour Management area does exist and the focus here is about consequences of NOT Learning social skills to function well in the group.

Most Behaviour Management and consequences are at classroom levels. Some students are referred to Deputy Principal’s for help.

Students in these phases who do not learn, cannot meet standards, tend to be dealt with as cases. Parents are involved in working cases.

Note: Behaviour in the early and middle years is dealt with firstly as LEARNING and failing that, for students who DO NOT learn we go into a suite of sanctions, with strategies like withdrawal, in school suspension, suspension from school or even in extreme cases exclusion.

These sanctions can be used but typically they occur after the exhaustion of all other options to help the individual learn. These strategies do engage parents, sometimes involve referral to specialists like psychologists (with parental support) and may involve more formal conferencing to help resolve issues.

The model we use for conferencing is the “Restorative Justice” model. I have included for your interest and reference a paper entitled “Restorative Practices” which I strongly suggest parents read because it expands on the whole issue of schools as social learning places. It further shows the basic learning principles which underpin our whole of school approach to behaviour management.

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<td>Bentley Street</td>
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<td>Early phases of Schooling - dependent learner</td>
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As a backdrop to these uniquely school transitions, which the school plans for and manages well in terms of preparing students for the change in geography, and putting learning opportunities around the move to more independent learning and changed structures, we have:-

- **The X Factor** – these transitions occur against the significant physical change sets that impact every adolescent.
The Y Factor – the psychological “re-alignments” that accompany the physical changes of the adolescent: For example:
- Identity importance within the peer group.
- The elevation in importance of the peer group challenging previous relationships – parent, authority, school staff.
- Awareness of, and interest in, the gender factor.
- There is more, but the reality is about a changing view of what relationships and behaviours are important, that are part of the individual’s learning as an adolescent.

The Z Factor – the extent to which the child in this transition has resilience or been successful as a social learner will impact on the transition. This factor also includes every other variable that could impact the adolescent and makes a complicated time for the adolescent just more complicated!

Note: The x, y and z factors are simply our way of describing the issues around the adolescent change!

Good schools are ones that have good planning and make this transition work for students in a purposeful manner. Our history around this transition is that our approach works, and the structures we build and maintain (and constantly review) around the adolescent learning needs, are built around our School Values and the Codes associated with “Choose Respect.”

For more details go to: - Choose Respect Code
- Positive Culture Framework

Consistent with the view of changing the learning mode to suit adolescents is the movement FROM “dependence as a learner” TOWARDS becoming “a more independent learner. Notwithstanding the Choose Respect behaviour codes, the basis of the adolescent learning environment is about MAKING CHOICES and it is about building relationships based on RESPECT.

Before we look specifically at the Policy Framework as it applies to Bentley Street I would like to tackle an element of the “fear factor” about the transition from Mead Street to Bentley Street.

The perception held by many is that in coming to Bentley Street the Year 6 and 7 children will be bullied by the older students.

Be aware that while it may happen on occasion by far the greater prevalence of bullying lies within the age cohort. Our Behaviour Management statistics emphatically reinforce this fact!

LOOKING AT THE BULLYING POLICY FRAMEWORK IN SITE CONTEXTS – BENTLEY STREET

In terms of BULLYING our starting point continues where we left off at Mead Street, and our approach is basically the same. Our approach continues to have a Teaching and Learning dimension in the general approach by teachers who seek “teaching moments” around behaviour. We continue with specialist programs in mental, social and emotional health with an additional new IT contextual focus about appropriate behaviours around the use of social media. The new face of bullying in the adolescent phase is CYBER BULLYING. (Please refer to Cyberbullying; Information for staff (NSW Education). Be aware we deal with cyber bullying in the same way as all other bullying behaviours.
Our second approach in dealing with Bullying is in the Behaviour Management area where we have clear and transparent processes and they are applied with consistency. Again in the lower levels of our process (bullying) behaviour is addressed as a “Learning problem”. The bully is given every opportunity to (choose) stop the poor behaviour and make amends normally with the victim and the bully reaching agreement.

If the bully learns (i.e., changes behaviour) then we simply move on, but if the behaviour is repeated (i.e., no learning) then we move into a graduated set of sanctions, in school, through suspension and possibly exclusion.

Along this journey we contact and engage parents, we conference, we consult with specialists and work other strategies that respect the right of all students to be safe at school. Refer to; Restorative Practice. For further information.

Note Regarding Bullying Link 6: “Restorative Practice”

I have included this paper on Restorative Justice entitled “Bullying and Victimization in Schools: A Restorative Justice Approach” it outlines the issues, the principles and good practice around Restorative Justice.

Regrettably we do not always succeed, but most of the time we do have positive outcomes and the things which influence success are:-

1. We find out early! We focus on empowering students to act about bullying by reporting it. This is a clear focus for students who are victims and also we target “bystanders” with this message. (Also see Bystanders article.) We counter the adolescent reluctance “to talk” by establishing strong trust and respectful relationships between students and staff. We have signage in most spaces that speaks to “The need to report Bullying” and “What can I do about being bullied or harassed?” and we have a structured way of getting the facts through a “Bullying Report”.
2. We need the parent partnerships to let us know what they find out.
3. We depersonalize the process through Restorative practice by addressing the behaviour NOT the person.
4. We follow through and monitor.

Our school acts affirmatively under its policy of “Zero tolerance” of bullying. It acts consistently on bullying as part of social learning and it has a wide range of strategies that match the needs of the student context K – 10.

If you have questions about BULLYING and our approach to dealing with it, please contact either the Principal or the deputies.

We recognize that bullying is a community issue and our school has an affirmative role in dealing with it. We believe our approach is consistent with our role as a learning organization and is modelled upon best current practice.

It is our intention to update this part of the web-site on a regular basis.