Preventing and Responding to Bullying

MSHS uses the PBL framework to help promote positive relationships and the wellbeing of all students, staff and visitors at the school.

Students who feel secure are more likely to be active participants in their learning and to achieve better physical, emotional, social and educational outcomes.

Teachers who feel valued and supported are more likely to engage positively with students and build stronger connections within the school community.

Parents who are positively engaged with their child's education leads to improved student self-esteem, attendance and behaviour at school.
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Defining bullying behaviours

The agreed national definition for Australian schools describes bullying as
- 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;
- involving an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening;
- happening 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);
- having immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders. Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

Behaviours that do not constitute bullying include:
- mutual arguments and disagreements (where there is no power imbalance)
- not liking someone or a single act of social rejection
- one-off acts of meanness or spite
- isolated incidents of aggression, intimidation or violence.

However, these conflicts are still considered serious and need to be addressed and resolved. At Mareeba State High School our staff will work to quickly respond to any matters raised of this nature in collaboration with students and parents.

The following flowchart explains the actions Mareeba State High School teachers will take when they receive a report about student bullying, including bullying which may have occurred online or outside of the school setting. Please note that the indicative timeframes will vary depending on the professional judgment of teachers who receive the bullying complaint and their assessment of immediate risk to student/s.

The following flowchart explains the actions staff will typically take when they receive a report about student bullying, including bullying which may have occurred online or outside of the school setting. Please note that the timeframes on this flowchart will vary depending on the professional judgment of teachers (e.g. their assessment of immediate risk to student/s).

Bullying response flowchart for teachers

Step 1	• Allow students to share their experience and feelings without interruption
	• As necessary, ask the student for examples they may have of the alleged bullying (e.g. hand written notes or screenshots)
	• Check with the student to ensure you have the facts correct
	• Evaluate the information to determine if bullying has occurred or if another disciplinary matter is at issue
	• If you hold immediate concerns for the student's safety, let the student know how you will address these.

Step 2	• Develop a plan with the student – outlining next steps (ask the student what they think may help) • Notify / refer to relevant personnel (e.g Year coordinator, HOD) of the issue and enlist additional support as required • As applicable, notify parent/s that the issue of concern is being investigated • Document your communication with the student (i.e OneSchool).
Step 3	• Complete all actions agreed with student (and if applicable parent/carers) within agreed timeframes • Document relevant actions in OneSchool • Monitor student and check in regularly on their wellbeing • As required, seek assistance from student support network (e.g. Student Services)

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is treated at Mareeba State High School with the same level of seriousness as in-person bullying.

In the first instance, students or parents who wish to make a report about cyberbullying should approach staff at Student Services (A Block)

It is important for students, parents and staff to know that state school principals have the authority to take disciplinary action to address student behaviours **that occur outside of school hours or school grounds**. This includes behaviour such as cyberbullying which may occur on weekends or during school holidays. It also applies to inappropriate online behaviour of enrolled students that is directed towards other community members or students from other school sites.

Parents and students who have concerns about cyberbullying incidents occurring during school holidays can seek assistance through the Office of the e-Safety Commissioner or the Queensland Police Service.

Parents or other stakeholders who engage in inappropriate online behaviour towards students, staff or other parents may be referred to the Office of the e-Safety Commissioner and/or the Queensland Police Service.

Cybersafety and Reputation Management (CRM)

The Department of Education employs a team to assist in maintaining departmental cybersafety processes. This team provides **direct support for schools** to respond to concerns of inappropriate online behaviour and misuse of information and communication technology.

The team also provides a guide for parents with important information about cybersafety and cyberbullying, and suggestions about what parents/carers can do if their child is a target or responsible for inappropriate online behaviour.

Student Intervention and Support Services

Mareeba State High School recognises the need to provide support to all students involved in incidents of bullying, including cyberbullying.

Students who have been subject or witness to bullying have access to a range of internal support staff, as identified in the Student Services table outlined on page 11 – 12.

Students are, however, also encouraged to approach any staff member with whom they feel comfortable sharing their concerns, regardless of their role in the school. As noted on the flowchart on page 23, all staff at Mareeba State High School are familiar with the response expectations to reports of bullying, and will act quickly to ensure students' concerns are addressed. Depending on the nature of the reported bullying incident, a formal plan of action may be developed and documented to support the implementation of strategies to assist the student.

Students who engage in bullying behaviours towards others will also be provided with support to assist them to use more socially acceptable and appropriate behaviours in their interactions. This includes counselling, social development programs, referral to mental health services or involvement in a restorative justice strategy. As noted above, school disciplinary measures may also be used to reinforce the seriousness with which the community takes all incidents of bullying. These measures may include withdrawal from social events or celebrations or more severe consequences such as suspension or exclusion from school.

Appropriate use of social media

The internet, mobile phones and social media provide wonderful opportunities for students to network and socialise online. While these technologies provide positive platforms for sharing ideas, they also have the potential to cause pain and suffering to individuals, groups or even whole communities.

It's important to remember that sometimes negative comments posted about the school community have a greater impact than expected. This guide offers some information about how to use social media in relation to comments or posts about the school community. Reputations of students, teachers, schools, principals and even parents can be permanently damaged — and in some cases, serious instances of inappropriate online behaviour are dealt with by police and the court system.

Being aware of a few simple strategies can help keep the use of social media positive and constructive:

- Before you post something online, ask yourself if the community or individual really need to know. Is it relevant, positive and helpful?
- Remember that what you post online is a direct reflection of who you are. People will potentially form lasting opinions of you based on what you post online.
- Be a good role model. If things get heated online consider logging out and taking a few moments to relax and think. Hasty, emotive responses could inflame situations unnecessarily.
- Be mindful when commenting, try to keep general and avoid posting anything that could identify individuals.
- A few years ago parents may have discussed concerns or issues with their friends at the school gate. Today with the use of social media, online discussions between you and your close friends can very quickly be shared with a much wider audience, potentially far larger than intended.
- Taking a few moments to think about the content you are about to post could save upset, embarrassment, and possible legal action.
- As a parent you have a role in supervising and regulating your child's online activities at home and its impact on the reputation and privacy of others. Parents are their child's first teachers — so they will learn online behaviours from you.