Whole School Policy on Bullying

Introduction
The Armidale School has a reputation as a family school and as a friendly school. Its published primary aim is to provide an education “founded on the Christian faith” and “enshrining Christian living” and its statement of aims includes a concern for a “caring environment” and “consideration for others”.

The School believes very strongly that every student has the right to a safe, supportive and caring environment free from intimidation of any kind, the right not to be hurt, scared, made fun of or saddened in any particular way.

The School categorically will not tolerate any student behaviour that denies or impugns this right.

Definition and Identification
What is Bullying?
“A wilful conscious desire to hurt another or put her/him under stress” (Tattum and Lane 1989)

“Bullying is exercised as intentional, often selective, uninvited behaviour. It can be psychological or physical in its intent by someone who is stronger physically or psychologically. A feature of bullying is that it is also often repeated hurtful behaviour” (Smith and Thompson 1991).

Forms of Bullying

Physical: fighting, punching, pushing, shoving, intimidating gestures, invasion of personal space.

Verbal: mocking, name calling, putting someone down, offensive language

Group: ganging up against, isolating or rejecting from the group

Victimisation: picking on, excluding, threatening to “get”, stand-over tactics

Indirect: offensive notes or graffiti, removing or hiding possessions, “trashing” areas, damaging others possessions.

Sexual: unwanted sexual invitation or inferences, touching or brushing against in a sexual manner, writing or drawing, or commenting about someone’s body sexually, sexually oriented jokes or sexual name calling, comments or questions about someone’s private life.

Racial: discrimination of any kind on the basis or race or religion.

Cyber: misuse of social sites to bully others, inappropriate texting, images used to hurt others.

It is understood that these forms of bullying may occur face to face, written or electronically and irrespective of the method used, all forms of bullying will be treated as such.

Identifying bullying
Openness Principle
Unfortunately victims can be reluctant to report bullying and authorities (parents and teachers) and witnesses can be reluctant to notice it, or simply accept it as normal.

The first principle in our school policy on bullying is that the School will be totally open on this matter, that it will promote discussion and enquiry, that it will encourage students to break the conspiracy of silence or reluctance to “dob in”.

To achieve this it will endeavour to create an atmosphere or care, it will ensure machinery is in place to encourage reporting and to eliminate any repercussions from reporting. It will only achieve this with cooperation from the whole school community, students, parents and staff. It will only be successful to the extent that everyone seeks to find solutions not to apportion blame, (e.g. parent aggressiveness on this topic encourages school defensiveness) i.e. the School will endeavour to create a supportive climate to break down the code of secrecy.

**Difficulties**

Bullying is aggressive behaviour which is usually identified on a continuum of severity. The difficulty is where does “play” end and bullying begin? Young children frequently resolve conflict in aggressive ways (Rogers 1985) which may not be bullying.

When does boyish boisterousness or rumbling become bullying? When does “She’s not my friend” become exclusion or sending to Coventry? When does a practical joke become indirect bullying? When does “let’s get him” become victimisation or group bullying? When does a friendly insult become mocking?

The answer lies firstly in intent or purpose, a wish to hurt; a wish to hurt or to gain advantage from the discomfort of another. Frequency is also an indication as is severity (hurt to the victim) or a mismatch in ages/strength.

Fun play can get out of hand and cause hurt but it may not be bullying if it was not intended. Nonetheless when the borders become blurred preventative action and counselling will probably be necessary.

The important point is to be aware and to be sensitive in a considered and caring reaction.

**Characteristics of Bullies and Victims**

Studies in Norway (Olweus) suggest that 9% of children are bullied, 6% are bullies. Studies in South Australia (Rigby and Slee) estimate that 10% of children are bullied and there are higher figures than these (“Psychology Today”, February 1988 - 1 in 7)

**Bullies**

Research* suggests that bullies

i. get their self esteem from acts of bullying  
ii. see aggression as an acceptable way of solving conflict  
iii. come from home backgrounds where aggressive behaviour is accepted or where there is inconsistent discipline (ranging from overly permissive to overly aggressive)  
iv. are more likely to go on to commit juvenile offences

** Victims**

Research* indicates that victims

i. have low self esteem and may be loners  
ii. are unassertive and sensitive  
iii. may come from over protective or unstable homes  
iv. are likely to be or become low achievers  
v. can sometimes be provocative rather than passive

(*Olweus, Rigby and Slee, Hyndman and Townsend, Smith and Thompson)

Two very important points emerge from this research:
Aggressive behaviour is learnt and you don’t deal with bullies with aggression and anger. Such a response only reinforces the behaviour of bullies.

Victims don’t deserve to be victims, i.e. it is not their fault that they are sensitive, or different or loners.

**Preventative Measures**

**Strategies for Dealing with bullying**

Our whole School policy is intended firstly to create a School atmosphere in which bullying has no place and secondly, when any instances do occur to deal with them openly and positively and unemotionally in a manner which while it will not tolerate the instances in any way will also enhance the caring atmosphere of the School. The most important measures are preventative.

**General advice for parents**

i. Actively support the School’s Christian aims at home and in particular caring for others.
ii. Don’t condone aggressive behaviour in any way and monitor games and television.
iii. Give time and love to your children as the basis for their self esteem.
iv. Be alert to any signs or distress or anxiety, unwillingness to attend School, missing equipment, damaged clothes or bruising.

v. Communicate closely and frankly and regularly with your child’s class teacher/tutor/Housemaster to establish a positive relationship, i.e. positive two way lines of communication.

vi. Take an interest in your child’s school activities, encourage him or her to talk to you about school (with an interested and caring ear, not a critical one) and to talk to trusted teachers.

vii. Don’t encourage hitting back

**General advice for staff**

i. Actively support the School’s Christian aims and in particular, caring for others

ii. Establish close relationships and trust between you and your class/tutor group. Take an interest in their interests and activities, and in their difficulties and problems.

iii. Look for areas in which you can encourage your students, help them achieve and build up their own self esteem.

iv. Establish close and positive relationships and communication with your parents (Class/Tutor group/House).

v. Be alert to any signs of distress or suspected incidents of bullying, take positive steps to overcome any problems and alert others (e.g. Housemaster/MIC Prep etc.).

vi. Avoid any forms of staff bullying (i.e. aggressive or bullying tactics to gain class control, or putting down students) and don’t allow any form of bullying (picking on others, snide or hurtful comments etc) in your classes.

vii. Be vigilant in patrolling playgrounds when on duty and be alert to danger spots and situations.

viii. Be punctual to class and be “nosy” about unstructured group gatherings of students.
General advice for students

i. Actively support the School’s Christian aims and in particular caring for others.
ii. Be prepared to report any bullying you see or at least take action to stop it. You can’t be neutral on bullying issues - a passive bystander only condones the action and bullies often look for crowd support.
iii. Seek to make true friends yourself. Putting others down may gain a cheap laugh but rarely secures true friendship.
iv. Try to ignore bullies, but be prepared to tell them to stop or to report them.
v. If you are bullied don’t assume it’s your fault or that no one cares or wants to know about it. Talk to a trusted teacher or friend. Talk to your parents. Tell someone about it.

Practical Considerations at TAS

By its nature as a boarding school and as a K-12 School, and by what it seeks to do in its activities TAS provides many positive opportunities for cooperative group learning and experiences. This is what helps to make it a family school and a friendly school. However, these opportunities also give scope for bullying and particular strategies have to be in place.

Boarding

All Housemasters are appointed on the understanding that their task is to create a positive boarding experience, not simply provide a hostel. The onus is on them to:

i. Have a tightly structured routine.
ii. Provide outings and activities which encourage harmony and working together in positive ways.
iii. Maintain close supervision through duty staff and prefects.
iv. Train their supervisors in caring for the students and in detecting, reporting and counteracting any kind of bullying.
v. Encourage peer support and break down the pecking order (eliminate “sack bashing”).

Cadets and Activities

Camps and excursions away from the normal school supportive environment can easily become a fertile ground for bullying if they are not properly planned and controlled. The onus on the organisers is to:

- Ensure that all leaders are aware of their responsibility to care and ensure that supervision is adequate.
- Ensure that the emphasis is on group work and especially in physical activities ensure that the strong support the weak.
- Ensure that there is always plenty to do and opportunities for the individual to achieve at his or her own level and so gain confidence.

Curriculum

While issues like bullying and aggression can readily be dealt with in any English reading syllabus there is scope at all levels and in all areas to show support for the School’s policies. The onus is on the Director of Studies and Coordinators to attempt to integrate this and other social issues into the curriculum.
Peer Support

In the Secondary School there is an attempt to provide peers support through Year 11 and 12 monitors or prefects. Bullying and how to combat it should be part of their training.

There may be scope also to develop mediation committees in the Houses or further Peer support in the Junior School School.

Sport and Physical Education

Sport should be a very positive way of bringing individuals together for a team. The onus is on the coaches to ensure that no factions develop, and that no one is victimised in any way. Similarly it is essential to have the right atmosphere for spectators and cheer squads. An emotional group is potentially dangerous if it has been fired up the wrong way. Staff and prefects must rigorously enforce the expected codes of behaviour.

New Students

- All new students are briefed about the School as much as possible beforehand. This briefing is to include advice on how to get on well with others. This advice in the case of new students in Years 10 and 11 will include comments about bullies and the School’s attitude (Note that there is a higher frequency of bullying among new senior students than among those that have been through the system.)
- Where the student is new to the class or year a buddy system will be established, i.e. a foster brother or sister will be appointed to look after the new student for at least the first week and the teacher or Housemaster will monitor the situation carefully.
- The School totally forbids any form of student initiation at any time or at any level. However, the onus is on the class teacher or Housemaster to prepare the class or House for a new student and to welcome her or him.
- Year 7 students, i.e. students beginning Secondary school have specific orientation procedures and it is School Policy to House them separately for their first year.

Transitional students

- Year 5 students already at the School will be invited to orientation activities in the Middle School and Middle School boarders will already be involved.
- Local Year 6 students who will come to TAS in Year 7 are invited to play sport with the School at the beginning of the summer season in Term 4 before their entry.
- Students moving into Year 8 are invited to orientation functions in their prospective Houses at least in Term 4 beforehand and to travel with their Houses on coast trips.

All of these orientation procedures are occasions where senior students and staff give a positive example of caring for younger students.
Specific Bullying Spots and Supervision

Particular attention is to be paid by teachers, duty staff, Housemasters and Prefects to:

- Playground areas.
- Toilets and change rooms
- House Common Rooms or Study Rooms
- Dormitories in out of normal hours.
- Meal lines and Tuckshop queues.
- Unsupervised classes or classrooms.
- Changes of Routine
- Laptops/Mobile phones

Dealing with Incidents

Action in Specific Cases of Bullying

**Victim**

- Demonstrate total support and care, i.e. immediate action.
- Assure victim that there will be no repercussions and take steps to ensure this.
- Obtain full reports of the incident/s in writing from all concerned.
- Inform parents/Housemaster/Advisor/class teacher on both sides, i.e. everyone concerned.
- Follow up quickly with any necessary discussions and if possible a rapprochement or meeting with the bully.
- Devise further strategies to build up self esteem, improve social skills and arrange counselling if necessary.
- Monitor progress after the incident.

**Bully**

- Isolate the bully immediately, i.e. withdraw him or her from the group situation while enquiries are made.
- Demonstrate (clearly and rationally, not emotionally) abhorrence for the incident and the fact that the School will not tolerate it.
- Warn of the seriousness of any repercussions or further incidents.
- Obtain full reports of the incident/s in writing from all concerned, especially from the bully.
- Inform parents/Housemaster/Advisor/class teacher on both sides, i.e. everyone concerned.
- Arrange follow up meetings with parents/teachers or as relevant and hopefully also the victim for a rapprochement.
- Devise further strategies, e.g. counselling, behaviour recovery (Rogers 1992) to teach alternatives to current behaviour.
- Monitor progress after the incident.

NB. “an important feature of school discipline practice is that it models non-punitive correction. Our role modelling is an important statement to all students. If we use public shaming, intentional embarrassment, ridicule, put downs, undue persistent criticism, unrelated consequences and aggressive rather than assertive management styles, such practices will override any policy statement about fundamental rights.
All discipline practices need to emphasise the purpose of discipline: to protect rights and enhance responsibility, accountability, self discipline and respect for others' rights” (William Rogers “Taming Bullies - a whole school focus”, 1993).

REFERENCES

The following books or articles are recommended for further reading or research. Some have been referred to in the policy above. Those asterisked are available in the School Library.


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