



STUDENT WELLBEING AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy, please contact the Principal.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all students and members of our school community understand:

- (a) our commitment to providing a safe and supportive learning environment for students
- (b) expectations for positive student behaviour
- (c) support available to students and families
- (d) our school's policies and procedures for responding to inappropriate student behaviour.

Merri River School is committed to providing a safe, secure and stimulating learning environment for all students. We understand that students reach their full potential only when they are happy, healthy and safe, and that a positive school culture helps to engage students and support them in their learning. Our school acknowledges that student wellbeing and student learning outcomes are closely linked.

The objective of this policy is to support our school to create and maintain a safe, supportive and inclusive school environment consistent with our school's values.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all school activities, including camps and excursions.

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POLICY

1. School profile

Merri River School is a centre of excellence providing individualised programs for students with an intellectual disability. The school caters for children aged between 5 to 18 in a small group environment that is academically in line with the Victorian Curriculum. Each student has an Individual Learning Plan.

The school is divided into four sub-schools: Junior Primary; Senior Primary; Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary. Each sub-school is led by a Learning Team Leader. This leadership team, together with the principal, assistant principal and leading teachers are fully supported by the staff and the school community.

Students are well supported by teachers, therapists and teacher assistants. Classes are fully engaged in learning activities that are improving outcomes for individuals. Some of our students have dual enrolment at a mainstream school when this has been deemed beneficial for the student’s learning program.

Year 11 and 12 students, who are deemed capable, undertake the VCAL certificate and VET in schools’ programs. All senior students are involved in a comprehensive work experience program to meet their needs.

2. School values, philosophy, and vision

School Philosophy

Merri River School is committed to providing safe, secure, and stimulating learning environment. Students can reach their full educational potential only when they are happy, healthy, and safe, and when there is a positive school culture to engage and support them in their learning. Student wellbeing and student learning outcomes are inextricably linked, and our school aims to promote an understanding of this link in both the school environment and in the classroom. It is fundamental to acknowledge that each teacher is a vital source of support and a determinant in the success of their students.

School Mission

Together We Achieve the Extraordinary.

School Vision

Our school challenges students to maximise their potential in an inclusive, engaging, and diverse environment.

School Values

- Be a Learner,
- Be Respectful,
- Be Safe,
- Be Responsible.



3. Engagement strategies

To realise our vision, our school has in place a range of strategies to promote engagement, positive behaviour, and respectful relationships for all students at our school. We recognise that some students, as a group or as individuals may need extra social, emotional, or educational support to flourish at school.

The partnership and communication between home and school is central to student attendance and effective engagement in instruction and learning. Student engagement can be defined by three interrelated components: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive.

- **Behavioural engagement** refers to student's participation in education, including the academic, social, and extracurricular activities within the school program
- **Emotional engagement** encompasses student's emotional reactions while in the classroom and school environment. It defines the student's sense of belonging or connectedness to the school
- **Cognitive engagement** relates to students' investment in learning and their intrinsic motivation and self-regulation

A summary of the universal (whole of school), targeted (year group specific) and individual engagement strategies used by our school is included below:

Universal

- Creating a child safe and friendly learning environment where students have a right to feel and be safe. The wellbeing of the students in our care will always be our first priority and we have a zero tolerance to child abuse.
- Collaboratively developing and implementing a fair and respectful whole school engagement and behaviour support approach
- Including pro-social values and behaviour within curriculum delivery to enable students to acquire knowledge and skills, value diversity and build a culture of learning, community, and engagement
- Providing students with a sense of ownership of their environment, promoting active student participation and voice
- Supporting families to engage in their child's learning and build their capacity as active learners
- Promoting the participation and empowerment of students
- Implementing preventative and early intervention approaches
- Building strong links with the local community to gain access to an extended network of community members, professionals, and educators
- Providing evidence-based systems and interventions for accountability
- Creating learning communities
- Promoting active student participation to improve student outcomes and engagement
- Having high and consistent expectations of all staff, students, parents, and carers
- Prioritising positive relationships between staff and students, recognising the fundamental role this plays in building and sustaining student wellbeing
- Creating a culture that is inclusive, engaging, and supportive

- Teachers at Merri River School adopting a broad range of teaching and assessment approaches to effectively respond to the diverse learning styles, strengths and needs of our students and follow the standards set by the Victorian Institute of Teaching
- Our school's Statement of Values are incorporated into our curriculum and promoted to students, staff, and parents so that they are shared and celebrated as the foundation of our school community
- Carefully planning transition programs to support students moving into different stages of their schooling
- Acknowledging positive behaviour and student achievement in the classroom, and formally in school assemblies and communication to parents
- Students have the opportunity to contribute to and provide feedback on decisions about school operations through the Student Representative Council and other forums. Students are also encouraged to speak with their teachers, and teacher aides whenever they have any questions or concerns.
- We engage in school wide positive behaviour support with our staff and students, which includes programs such as:
 - Respectful Relationships
 - Bully Stoppers
 - Safe Schools
- Providing programs, incursions and excursions developed to address issue specific behaviour
- Providing opportunities for student inclusion (i.e., sports teams, clubs, recess, and lunchtime activities)
- Corporal punishment is not permitted at Merri River School.

Targeted

Providing a stimulating and secure learning environment

- Each sub-school has a Learning Team Leader, a senior teacher responsible for their sub-school, who monitor the health and wellbeing of students in their sub-school, and act as a point of contact for students who may need additional support
- All students from Year 11 and above will be assisted to develop a Career Action Plan, with targeted goals and support to plan for their future
- Connect all Koorie students with the wellbeing staff
- All students in Out of Home Care will be appointed a Learning Mentor, have an Individual Learning Plan and a Student Support Group (SSG) and will be referred to Student Support Services for an Educational Needs Assessment
- Merri River School assists students to plan their Senior Secondary work experience
- Wellbeing and health staff will undertake health promotion and social skills development in response to needs identified by student wellbeing data, classroom teachers or other school staff each year
- Staff will apply a trauma-informed approach to working with students who have experienced trauma

Individual

Merri River School implements a range of strategies that support and promote individual engagement. These can include:

- building constructive relationships with students at risk or students who are vulnerable due to complex individual circumstances
- meeting with student and their parent/carer to talk about how best to help the student engage with school
- developing an Individual Learning Plan and/or a Behaviour Support Plan
- considering if any environmental changes need to be made, for example changing the classroom set up
- referring the student to:
 - school-based wellbeing supports
 - Student Support Services
 - Appropriate external supports such as council-based youth and family services, other allied health professionals, headspace, child, and adolescent mental health services or Child First
 - Re-engagement programs

Where necessary the school will support the student's family to engage by:

- being responsive and sensitive to changes in the student's circumstances, health, and wellbeing
- collaborating, where appropriate and with the support of the student and their family, with any external allied health professionals, services or agencies that are supporting the student
- monitoring individual student attendance and developing an Attendance Improvement Plans in collaboration with the student and their family
- running regular Student Support Group meetings for all students:
 - with a disability
 - in Out of Home Care
 - and with other complex needs that require ongoing support and monitoring.

4. Identifying students in need of support

Merri River School is committed to providing the necessary support to ensure our students are supported intellectually, emotionally, and socially. The Student Wellbeing team plays a significant role in developing and implementing strategies help identify students in need of support and enhance student wellbeing. Merri River School will utilise the following information and tools to identify students in need of extra emotional, social, or educational support:

- personal, health and learning information gathered upon enrolment and while the student is enrolled
- attendance records
- observations by school staff such as changes in engagement, behaviour, self-care, social connectedness, and motivation
- attendance, detention, and suspension data
- engagement with families
- self-referrals or referrals from peers

5. Student rights and responsibilities

All members of our school community have a right to experience a safe and supportive school environment. We expect that all students, staff, parents, and carers treat each other with respect and dignity. Our school's Statement of Values highlights the rights and responsibilities of members of our community.

Students have the right to:

- participate fully in their education
- feel safe, secure, and happy at school
- learn in an environment free from bullying, harassment, violence, discrimination, or intimidation
- express their ideas, feelings, and concerns.

Students have the responsibility to:

- participate fully in their educational program
- display positive behaviours that demonstrate respect for themselves, their peers, their teachers, and members of the school community
- respect the right of others to learn.

Students who may have a complaint or concern about something that has happened at school are encouraged to speak to their parents or carers and approach a trusted teacher or a member of the school leadership team.

6. Student behavioural expectations and management

Behavioural expectations of students, staff and families are grounded in our school's Statement of Values. Student bullying behaviour will be responded to consistently with Merri River School's Bullying policy.

When a student acts in breach of the behaviour standards of our school community, Merri River School will institute a staged response, consistent with the Department's policies on behaviour, discipline and student wellbeing and engagement. Where appropriate, parents will be informed about the inappropriate behaviour and the disciplinary action taken by teachers and other school staff.

Our school considers, explores, and implement positive and non-punitive interventions to support student behaviour before considering disciplinary measures such as detention, withdrawal of privileges or withdrawal from class.

Disciplinary measures may be used as part of a staged response to inappropriate behaviour in combination with other engagement and support strategies to ensure that factors that may have contributed to the student's behaviour are identified and addressed. Disciplinary measures at our school will be applied fairly and consistently. Students will always be provided with an opportunity to be heard.

Disciplinary measures that may be applied include:

- warning a student that their behaviour is inappropriate
- teacher controlled consequences such as moving a student in a classroom or other reasonable and proportionate responses to misbehaviour
- withdrawal of privileges
- referral to the Wellbeing Team
- restorative practices

- detentions
- behaviour support and intervention meetings
- suspension
- expulsion

Suspension, expulsion, and restrictive interventions are measures of last resort and may only be used in situations consistent with Department policy, available at:

- <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/suspensions/policy>
- <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/expulsions/policy>
- <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/restraint-seclusion/policy>

In line with Ministerial Order 1125, no student aged 8 or younger will be expelled without the approval of the Secretary of the Department of Education and Training.

The Principal of Merri River School is responsible for ensuring all suspensions and expulsions are recorded on CASES21.

Corporal punishment is prohibited in our school and will not be used in any circumstance.

7. Engaging with families

Merri River School values the input of parents and carers, and we will strive to support families to engage in their child's learning and build their capacity as active learners. We aim to be partners in learning with parents and carers in our school community.

We work hard to create successful partnerships with parents and carers by:

- ensuring that all parents have access to our school policies and procedures, available on our school website
- maintaining an open, respectful line of communication between parents and staff, supported by our Communicating with School Staff policy.
- involving families in school decision making
- coordinating resources and services from the community for families
- including families in Student Support Groups and developing individual plans for students.

8. Evaluation

Merri River School will collect data each year to understand the frequency and types of wellbeing issues that are experienced by our students so that we can measure the success or otherwise of our school-based strategies and identify emerging trends or needs.

Sources of data that will be assessed on an annual basis include:

- student survey data
- incidents data
- school reports
- parent survey
- case management
- CASES21, including attendance and absence data
- SOCS

Merri River School will also regularly monitor available data dashboards to ensure any wellbeing or engagement issues are acted upon in a timely manner and any intervention occurs as soon as possible.

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
- Made available in hard copy from school administration upon request

Our school will also ensure it follows the mandatory parent/carer notification requirements with respect to suspensions and expulsions outlined in the Department's policies at:

- [Suspension process](#)
- [Expulsions - Decision](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- [Statement of Values and School Philosophy Policy](#)
- [Bullying Prevention Policy](#)
- [Child Safety Policy](#)

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	24/02/2022
Endorsed and ratified	22 nd Feb 2022 – SRC and Wellbeing Team 15 March School Council
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	February 2024