

St Mary's Diversity and Equity Policy

St Mary's Parish School (St Mary's) operates with the consent of the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat and is owned, operated and governed by Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL).

Rationale

The purpose of this policy is to explain St Mary's commitment to making sure every member of the school community, regardless of their background or personal attributes, is treated with respect and dignity.

"As partners in Catholic education and open to God's presence, we pursue fullness of life for all" (DOBCEL Vision Statement)

To meet the rights of all students, DOBCEL schools must continue to have a strong commitment to respecting and valuing student diversity, inclusion, wellbeing and identity formation - spiritually, ethically and cognitively. The commitment that we all share pertains to ability, culture, race, socio-economic status, ethnicity, philosophy of life, gender identity and sexual orientation. Diversity enriches the communal life of Catholic schools and the community in which we live.

'Based on their identity and experience, others have a contribution to make, and it is desirable they should articulate their positions for the sake of a more fruitful public debate.' Pope Francis, *Encyclical Fratelli tutti*, s.203.

DOBCEL believes that the principles of diversity and equity are predicated on the intention to provide an educational environment that promotes the human dignity of each student within a supportive Catholic community. Our principles recognise:

- practice that is informed by the teachings of Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Tradition, legislative requirements, educational philosophy, and societal expectations
- the uniqueness and diversity of students as children, created in the image of God
- the need for belonging within a Christ-oriented community underpinned by respectful relationships
- a whole school approach to planning, curriculum development and school organisation informed by Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI)

Policy Statement

St Mary's will ensure that equity is upheld, and diverse needs are respected in policy and practice by ensuring that:

- staff and volunteers, understand the diverse circumstances of children young people, and provide support and respond to vulnerable children and young people's needs
- children, young people, staff, volunteers, and the school community have access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible, and easy to understand
- staff and volunteers understand that written documents alone are not relied on, particularly for children and young people who are blind or vision impaired, or children and young people who cannot read
- staff and volunteers pay particular attention to the needs of children and young people with disability, children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children and young people who are unable to live at home, international students, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) children and young people
- staff and volunteers pay particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and provide and promote a culturally safe environment for them
- staff and volunteers understand that children and young people can be deemed vulnerable by a government agency, funded family service or family violence service, or assessed as requiring education and care outside the family home, because of a referral from a government agency, funded family service or family violence

- service, homeless or youth justice service; or mental health or other health services
- staff and volunteers understand that vulnerable children and young people can self-identify or are identified as a member of a vulnerable cohort (for example Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people; children and young people with disability; children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; children and young people who are unable to live at home or are in out-of-home care; international students; and children and LGBTIQ+ young people).

St Mary's strives to provide a safe, inclusive, and supportive school environment which values the human rights of all students and staff.

St Mary's is committed to creating a school community where all members of the school community are welcomed, accepted, and treated equitably and with respect regardless of their backgrounds or personal attributes such as race, language, religious beliefs, gender identity, disability, or sexual orientation so that they can participate, achieve, and thrive at school.

St Mary's acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of backgrounds and experiences in the school community. Behaviours, language, or practices that label, stereotype or demean others will not be tolerated. At St Mary's the human rights of every child and young person are valued and the obligations under anti-discrimination laws and the *Charter of Human Rights* responsibilities are taken seriously.

St Mary's will:

- actively nurture and promote a culture where everyone is treated with respect and dignity
- ensure that children and young people are not discriminated against (directly or indirectly) and where necessary, adjustments are made as required to participate in their education and school activities (e.g., schools sports, concerts, liturgies, excursions, on the same basis as their peers)
- acknowledge and respond to the diverse needs, identities, and strengths of all children and young person
- encourage empathy and fairness towards others
- challenge stereotypes that promote prejudicial and biased behaviours and practices
- contribute to positive learning, engagement, and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people
- respond to complaints and allegations appropriately and ensure that children and young people are not victimised.

Bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment, vilification, and other forms of inappropriate behaviour targeting individuals or groups because of their personal attributes will not be tolerated at St Mary's. We will respond appropriately, consistent with this and other Child Safe policies to meet the needs of children and young people who demonstrate these behaviours at our school.

Students who may have experienced or witnessed this type of behaviour are encouraged to speak up and to let their teachers, parents or caregivers know about those behaviours to ensure that inappropriate behaviour can be addressed.

Reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities

St Mary's also understands that it has a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with disabilities. A reasonable adjustment is a measure or action taken to assist students with disabilities to participate in their education on the same basis as their peers. Reasonable adjustments will be made for students with disabilities in consultation with the student, their parents or caregivers, their teachers and if appropriate, their treating practitioners. The school may consult through Student Support Group processes and in other less formal ways. For more information about support available for students with disabilities and communicating with the school in relation to a student's disability, please refer to the St Mary's website or call to speak with our Learning Diversity Leader.

Culturally Safe Environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

In relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, Pope Francis challenges us to seek answers to the “alienation and exclusion, rejection and impoverishment to which millions of the world’s young people are condemned, especially the youth of native peoples.” (2019)

St Mary’s also understands to comply with Child Safe Standard 1 a school must, at minimum, ensure:

- a child and young person’s ability to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights is encouraged and actively supported
- strategies are embedded within the organisation which equip all members to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and understand its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- measures are adopted by the organisation to ensure racism within the organisation is identified, confronted, and not tolerated. Any instances of racism are addressed with appropriate consequences
- the school actively supports and facilitates participation and inclusion within it by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families, caregivers, or guardians
- all the school’s policies, procedures, systems, and processes together create a culturally safe and inclusive environment and meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families, caregivers, or guardians.

For more information about support available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and communicating with us in relation to a student’s culturally identity, please refer to our school website, the CECV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan or speak to a staff member.

Communication

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

- available publicly on our website
- included in our staff handbook and induction processes
- discussed annually at staff meeting
- included in enrolment packs
- discussed at parent and caregiver information nights/sessions

Definitions

Cultural safety: Cultural safety is about creating an environment that is safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This means there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience. Cultural safety is about:

- strategic and institutional reform to remove barriers to the optimal health, wellbeing, and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes addressing unconscious bias, racism, and discrimination, and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination
- shared respect, shared meaning, and shared knowledge
- the experience of learning together with dignity and truly listening
- individuals, organisations, and systems ensuring their cultural values do not negatively impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including addressing the potential for unconscious bias, racism, and discrimination
- individuals, organisations, and systems ensuring self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes sharing power (decision-making and governance) and resources with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is especially relevant for the design, delivery, and evaluation of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Cultural safety is the positive recognition and celebration of cultures. It is more than just the absence of racism or discrimination and more than ‘cultural awareness’ and ‘cultural sensitivity’. It empowers people and allows them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves. (CCYP, 2022, p.172)

Culturally and linguistically diverse: Culturally and linguistically diverse is a broad and inclusive term for communities with diverse language, ethnic background, nationality, dress, traditions, food, societal structures, art and religion characteristics

Culturally and linguistically diverse does not usually include Aboriginal communities and people because of distinct history and experience as Australia's First Nations people. For the purpose of the Standards there are specific considerations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, however, the cultural and linguistic diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is also acknowledged

Direct discrimination: less favourable treatment because of a person's protected attribute

Diversity: describes a range of personal characteristics, circumstances, life experiences and backgrounds. The combination of these differences makes up a child's unique identity and shapes the way they experience the world and the types of needs they have

Disability harassment: an action taken in relation to the person's disability that is reasonably likely, in all the circumstances, to humiliate, offend, intimidate, or distress the person

Equity: means making adjustments so that children and young people have equal opportunity for the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to be safe regardless of their characteristics, circumstances, life experiences and backgrounds

Human rights: are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

Indirect discrimination: imposing an unreasonable requirement, condition or practice that disadvantages a person or group of people with a protected attribute

Personal attribute: a personal characteristic that is protected by state or commonwealth anti-discrimination legislation. These include: race, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious belief or activity, political belief or activity, age, intersex status, physical features, pregnancy, caregiver and parental status, breastfeeding, marital or relationship status, lawful sexual activity, employment activity, industrial activity, expunged homosexual conviction or personal association with anyone who is identified with reference to any protected attribute

Racism: includes prejudice, discrimination or hatred directed at someone because of their colour, ethnicity, or national origin. Racism can be revealed through people's actions as well as their attitudes. It can also be reflected in systems and institutions. Racism is more than just words, beliefs, and actions. It includes all the barriers that prevent people from enjoying dignity and equality because of their race

Sexism: is when people are treated unfairly or bullied because of their sex. All children, young people and adults, regardless of their sex characteristics or identity, should be treated fairly and given equal opportunities. It is against the law to be treated unfairly or bullied because of your sex. Outdated gender stereotypes can lead to sexist attitudes and discriminatory behaviour

Sexual harassment: unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature towards another person which could reasonably be expected to make that other person feel offended, humiliated, or intimidated. It may be physical, verbal, visual or written

Victimisation: subjecting a person or threatening to subject them to detrimental treatment because they (or their associate) have made an allegation of discrimination or harassment based on a protected attribute (or asserted their rights under relevant policies or law).

Vilification: conduct that incites hatred towards or revulsion or severe ridicule of a person or group of people based on their race or religion.

Policy Review and Approval

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's two-year review cycle of its child safety practices.