St Thomas Aquinas College

Student Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy

1 Introduction

St Thomas Aquinas College (**the College**) is committed to providing a respectful, safe and supportive learning environment that is inclusive and welcoming for all students. Bullying (including harassment), in any form, can have immediate and long-term negative impacts, and will not be tolerated at the College and will be treated with the utmost seriousness.

Peer-to-peer dynamics can be complex for students to navigate and challenging for schools and families to address. Knowing exactly what bullying is, and understanding why it occurs, is critical to finding positive and lasting solutions for everyone involved. Students can play various roles within a particular dynamic, and even those not directly involved can play a vital role as upstanders.

2 Scope

This policy applies, at all times, to students enrolled at the College. A Year 12 student is considered to be enrolled until the day after the completion of all Year 12 final exams or any College graduation function/event which the Year 12 student is invited to by the College (whichever occurs later).

The application of this policy is not limited to the College's site and operating hours. It extends to all activities, events and interactions that are school-related, including when students are:

- On school grounds, or within the College's digital environment.
- At any school-related activity (including for example camps, events, excursions, incursions, Church services and religious events, retreats, sport, awards nights).
- Representing the College, including when off campus.
- Travelling to and from school, as well as to and from off-site activities.
- Wearing the school uniform.
- Under the College's legal duty of care.
- Otherwise engaging in behaviour which in the reasonable opinion of the College may affect student safety and wellbeing, student relationships, staff safety and wellbeing, staff-student relationships, or the reputation of the College.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the *Student Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct*.

3 Aim

Bullying is managed through a 'whole-of-College community' approach involving students, staff and parents/carers.

This policy aims to:

- Support a culture of positive behaviour with high levels of student engagement as essential for creating a positive, respectful and safe learning environment.
- Establish transparency around processes followed when students exhibit adverse behaviours.
- Promote the safety and wellbeing of all the members of the community.
- Support the development of self-discipline, self-respect, self-worth, and respect for others.
- Create an environment where the right of students to learn and the right of teachers to teach is respected.
- Ensure bullying prevention strategies are tailored to the circumstances of each incident and implemented within the College on a continuous basis with a focus on teaching age-appropriate skills and strategies to empower staff, students and parents/carers to recognise bullying and respond appropriately.
- Assist staff to be positive role models.

Bullying prevention and intervention strategies are reviewed regularly in light of recent learnings and understood best practice.

4 Definition

Bullying is an **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. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop the behaviour.

Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and 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).

Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders.

5 Examples of Bullying

Bullying can happen in different ways. Examples of bullying include:

- **Verbal** bullying, which includes name calling, teasing, abuse, putdowns (particularly those which refer to personal characteristics and impact on self-esteem), sarcasm, insults, threats of unfair criticism, suggestive comments, inappropriate or demeaning comments, and the spreading of gossip or rumours.
- **Non-verbal** bullying, which includes writing offensive notes, graffiti about others, rude gestures, and damaging other people's possessions.

- **Physical** bullying, which includes physical actions such as hitting, pushing, obstructing, rubbing, grabbing, punching, kicking, scratching, tripping, spitting, taking/damaging property, using a weapon, and any other unwelcome physical contact used to intimidate or hurt someone.

- **Social** bullying, which includes ignoring, excluding, ostracising, alienating (including forming groups to leave out, ignore and disrespect others), whispering, making inappropriate gestures, looks, stares and facial expressions, and manipulating friendships or peer dynamics (for example, "*you can't sit with us if you are friends with them*").

- **Racial** bullying, which includes treating someone inappropriately because of their race, culture, ethnicity or language. This may involve using racial slurs, making derogatory or inappropriate comments in respect of a person's race, mocking a person's accent, stereotyping, or excluding a person because of their race, culture or language.

- **Ableism**, which includes treating someone differently or unfairly because of a disability or additional learning, physical, cognitive or sensory need. This may involve using derogatory slurs, seeking to trigger a person in respect of their disability (for example, flashing lights in the eyes of someone with sensory sensitivity or epilepsy), excluding a person because of their disability, interfering with assistive devices (such as a wheelchair or hearing aid) or mimicking physical movements, speech patterns or sensory behaviours.

- **Sexual** bullying, which includes any unwelcome written, verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature (including those actions which are perceived to be sexual in nature). This may involve sexually orientated jokes, drawings of or writing about another person's body, unwanted invitations or advances of a sexual nature, showing explicit images without permission, asking questions about another person's sexual activity, gender identity or orientation, and "rating" someone's appearance or body.

- **Psychological** bullying, which includes when words or actions are used to cause psychological harm. Examples of psychological bullying include name calling, teasing, hiding or damaging possessions or making fun of someone because of their actions, appearance, physical characteristics or cultural background. Malicious digital messages, and inappropriate use of camera phones, photographic and video images are also forms of psychological bullying.

- **Indirect** bullying, which includes when deliberate acts of exclusion or spreading of untrue stories are used to hurt or intimidate someone, or to otherwise damage their reputation. Indirect bullying also includes influencing or organising someone else to bully or harass another person to hurt or intimidate someone.

- **Cyberbullying,** which includes the ongoing abuse of power to threaten or harm another person using technology, this can occur in chat rooms, on social networking sites, through emails, text messaging, the internet or other online forums. Further detail on cyberbullying is set out later in this policy.

- **Harassment,** which includes unwelcome or unreciprocated behaviour that makes a person feel offended, humiliated, belittled, degraded, devalued, or intimidated. Harassment may be a single incident or a series of incidents and may also include behaviour which is discriminatory on the basis of a personal characteristic such as race, age, gender, disability, religion, sexuality or other protected attributes.

6 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to bullying behaviours carried out using digital technologies. This may include harassment via social media, messaging apps, mobile phones, email, online forums, gaming platforms, and other digital environments. Examples include sending offensive messages, posting or sharing harmful content, setting up defamatory websites or accounts, impersonating others, or deliberately excluding someone from online groups.

Cyberbullying can be particularly damaging because of the capacity to humiliate, hurt and harm a person in front of a huge 'audience'. Harmful material can be shared widely, rapidly and repeatedly, and may remain online long after the initial incident, even if the original post is deleted.

A dangerous feature of cyber bullying is that it can be done quickly and easily. On an impulse, a person can create emotional havoc for another and do so before the voice of reason hints at the inappropriateness of the action.

A further concern is that the person engaging in cyberbullying is often unaware of the extent of the harm they are causing, as cyberbullying rarely occurs face-to-face. The physical distance and lack of immediate feedback can reduce empathy and make their behaviour feel less serious to them. Cyberbullies may also act anonymously, which can further embolden harmful behaviour by reducing accountability and increasing the sense of detachment from the consequences of their actions.

Additionally, unlike face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying can occur 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including outside school hours and within the home. Because digital devices are portable and always connected, many students feel they cannot escape the behaviour, making cyberbullying relentless and omnipresent.

Cyberbullying represents unlawful activity that may result in police laying charges. Cyberbullying has also been linked to depression, self-harm and even suicide.

Further examples of cyberbullying include:

- Sending hateful or threatening comments or pictures via an instant messaging service, AI platform, mobile phone, the internet, or by social networking sites such as X (formerly known as Twitter), Tumblr, Snapchat, Be Real, Instagram, TikTok, Roblox, Discord, Steam Chat, WhatsApp and Facebook.

- Sending messages containing emojis intended to be hateful, threatening or harmful, particularly where emojis are used to disguise intent or escalate the tone of communication.

- Using modern technologies to exclude someone or to engage in hate group recruitment, including through comment sections or within private group chats.

- Posting rude, explicit or embarrassing messages, comments or pictures of or about someone online.

- Stealing someone's identity or otherwise impersonating a person to harm them in some way.

- Putting pressure on a person to send revealing or compromising pictures of themselves.

- Covertly filming, recording or taking a picture of someone and posting the images on the internet.

- Disseminating confidential, sensitive or private information about someone.

- Engaging in 'flaming', which refers to sending hostile, aggressive or inflammatory messages online.

- Multi-messaging or message-spamming to clog up a person's electronic system.

- 'Catfishing' or using aliases, fake profiles or pseudonyms on social networking sites, messaging platforms or chat rooms to deceive, impersonate, harass or upset another person, including creating false identities to manipulate or target someone.

- Engaging in cyber-stalking and the invasion of privacy.

- Referring to the College in a negative or disparaging manner.

7 What is Not Bullying?

Many distressing behaviours do not come within the definition of bullying, even though they are unpleasant and often require staff intervention and management.

Behaviours that do not constitute bullying include:

- **Single incidents** – Single episodes of nastiness, intimidation, violence or acts of physical aggression are not the same as bullying. For example, if a student is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion, this behaviour does not constitute bullying. Similarly, acts of nastiness or physical aggression directed toward *multiple different students* on a one-off basis are not classified as bullying.

- **Mutual conflict** – Bullying behaviour does not include disagreements between equals, situations of mutual conflict or children not getting along well. In mutual conflict situations, there is an argument or disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and both usually want to resolve the problem.

  However, unresolved mutual conflict sometimes develops into a bullying situation with one person becoming targeted repeatedly for 'retaliation' in a one-sided way.

- **Social rejection or dislike** – Not liking a person or a one-off act of social rejection, meanness or spite is not bullying. Social rejection can become bullying when it is directed towards someone specific and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others. Without repeated and intentional harm, social rejection alone is not considered bullying.

However, all the behaviours described above can include conduct which falls short of the *Student Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct* and warrant disciplinary outcomes. These situations can also negatively impact those involved and may require support.

8 Signs of Bullying

Major behavioural changes in a student may be indicative of bullying. Such behaviour changes may include:

- Becoming aggressive and unreasonable.

- Physical or verbal altercations.

- Refusing to talk about what is wrong.

- Difficulty sleeping, crying at night and having nightmares.

- Frequent complaints of feeling ill in the mornings.

- Unwillingness or refusal to go to school.
- Unexplained bruises, cuts or scratches.
- A drop in academic performance.
- Becoming withdrawn and lacking confidence.
- Beginning to bully siblings and others.

Less obvious signs could include a student that:

- Is often alone or excluded from friendship groups at school.
- Is a frequent target for teasing, mimicking or ridicule at school.
- Changes their willingness to speak up in class.
- Withdraws from friends and activities they previously enjoyed.
- Appears insecure or frightened in the classroom.
- Is exhibiting sudden changes in mood, appetite or energy levels.
- Has changed their online behaviour, including by deleting accounts, avoiding devices, or appearing distressed after using digital devices.
- Is overly protective of their digital devices or unusually secretive about online activity.

Parents/carers are encouraged to recognise signs of bullying and notify the College through the classroom teacher or another trusted member of staff immediately, if they suspect their child is a victim of bullying, whether in person or online.

9 The College's Response to, and Management of Reports of Bullying

The College encourages all staff, students and parents to report bullying so that it can be dealt with promptly and appropriately. Most reports can be managed internally; however, in cases where the behaviour may constitute a criminal offence or involve serious harm, it may be appropriate for the College to notify external authorities.

When suspected bullying is reported to the College, students and parents can expect that a member of staff will:

- Reassure the student that they will be supported and assisted by the College.
- Reassure the student that bullying is not tolerated by the College.
- Avoid minimising the issue, or making dismissive comments that imply the issue is not important.
- Find a suitable place to talk or make a time to discuss the problem privately.
- Ensure that their voice is calm and body language is open as they listen to the concerns being raised.
- Listen without interrupting, using encouraging prompts and showing active engagement.

- Once the student has shared their version of events, ask further clarifying questions as needed.

- if the student has not already advised, ask the student: "*who, what, when, why, how and where"* questions, including by asking:

  What words have been said or written?

  Has anyone been physically hurt and how?

  Who is usually around?

  Who else has the student told about this?

- Is there any evidence of what has happened? (This typically relates to screenshots etc. in instances of cyberbullying).

- Ask the student questions to help distinguish between single incidents of conflict and an ongoing pattern of bullying.

- Ask the student to write down any information they have about their concerns.

- Reassure the student it is never okay to be bullied.

- Reassure the student it is not their fault that the other person is behaving in such a way that makes the student feel the way they are feeling.

- Praise the student for speaking out and acknowledge that talking about it takes lots of courage.

- Ask the student what they want the College to do in response (for example, a stop bullying conversation or a formal investigation). The College will consider a range of possible outcomes, including (but not limited to) the implementation of a class seating plan, assigning a mentor to the accused victim or bully or both, and referrals to wellbeing and support services.

- Reassure the student that the College takes their concerns seriously and that the College will follow up as quickly as possible.

- Ask the student if they feel safe in the short term and consider whether interim preventative safety measures may need to be implemented.

The College will respond to concerns of bullying in accordance with the *Student Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct*, including by ensuring that all students involved are afforded procedural fairness throughout the process.

10 Responsibilities and Delegations

The College has allocated the following responsibility and delegations in support of its commitment to prevent and manage bullying.

Principal	• Ensure a safe, secure and harmonious work environment for students and staff • Develop, implement and monitor this policy and ensure it is evaluated and reviewed by the school community

	• Ensure staff receive ongoing training and professional development to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying, cyberbullying and harassment • Ensure that this policy is available to the school community • Employ staff who have specialist skills in supporting and educating both targets and perpetrators of bullying • Ensure effective pastoral and wellbeing support for students • Model and promote appropriate relationships and behaviours
Leadership Executive	• Ensure staff are aware of this policy and monitor its implementation • Model and promote appropriate relationships and behaviours • Ensure anti-bullying, digital safety and respectful-relationships education is included in the curriculum • Implement, coordinate and monitor strategies for dealing with bullying and harassment matters when raised • Conduct periodic confidential wellbeing and bullying surveys and follow up with identified students (including perpetrators and targets) where appropriate • Identify patterns or trends in bullying behaviour and initiate targeted College action to respond • Provide feedback to the appropriate persons when bullying and harassment issues occur • Use a range of interventions and sanctions applicable to various age groups and situations to deal with and discourage bullying behaviour in accordance with the *Student Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct* • Manage and oversee bullying-related complaints, ensuring timely, fair and thorough investigation • Liaise with external agencies, including the College's Police Liaison Officer, where required • Maintain partnerships with parents in the prevention and appropriate response to bullying behaviours • Ensure that consequences for bullying include opportunities for students to learn more appropriate social skills and responsible behaviours through explicit teaching of these behaviours
Teachers	• Contribute to the development of this policy and support its implementation • Model and promote appropriate relationships and behaviours • Remain vigilant to signs of bullying and take proactive steps to minimise opportunities for bullying in classrooms and playgrounds • Monitor, address and follow up on bullying and/or harassment matters when identified in a timely manner • Provide feedback to the appropriate persons when bullying and harassment occur • Promote and reinforce positive behaviours, inclusion and respect to foster a bully-free environment

	• Support and implement programs that build student understanding of bullying, conflict resolution and help-seeking behaviours • Provide opportunities for students to learn about positive behaviour including problem solving and conflict resolution, bullying and the College's process for responding to bullying • Actively supervise whilst on duty to maintain a strong staff presence • Actively engage with professional development regarding anti-bullying and harassment strategies • Notify the Leadership Executive of allegations of bullying as soon as possible • Work with the College's Leadership Executive to assist in responses to bullying • Be familiar with and follow this policy for preventing and responding to bullying
Parents	• Support the College in the implementation of this policy and assist their child(ren) in understanding bullying behaviour • Notify a teacher, or another trusted member of staff, if they believe their child or another child is experiencing bullying • Model positive social behaviour and respectful relationships in interactions with the College community, including in interactions with teachers, other parents and students • Work collaboratively with the College to resolve bullying when it occurs and promote appropriate behaviour
Students	• Follow College policies and procedures (including this policy and the *Student Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct*) • Notifying a teacher or another trusted member of staff if they witness or experience bullying, whether in person or online • Implement strategies teachers have suggested when responding to bullying • Behave appropriately, respecting individual differences and diversity • Take responsibility for ensuring other students can learn in a safe and supportive environment and contribute to the safety and wellbeing of others

11 Bullying Prevention Strategies

The College recognises that the implementation of school-wide prevention strategies is the most effective way of eliminating, or at least minimising incidents of bullying within our community. Prevention efforts focus on building a positive school culture, strengthening student skills and relationships, and ensuring staff, parents/carers and students are equipped to identify concerns early.

The following initiatives form part of our overall bullying prevention strategy and our strategy to create a 'no bullying' culture within the College:

- Implementing a structured curriculum and peer group support system, which provides age-appropriate information and skills relating to bullying (including cyberbullying) and bullying prevention, to students over the course of the academic year.

- Providing staff with education, training, and professional development in bullying prevention, early identification, trauma-informed practice, digital safety and effective response strategies.

- Offering regular information to parents/carers to raise awareness of bullying as a whole-community issue, to equip them to recognise signs of bullying, and how to report concerns. This information is provided through the Parent Handbook, newsletters and the College website, and covers wellbeing, digital safety, discipline, and the College's approach to managing bullying.

- Providing contact details for the key staff responsible for bullying prevention and responses in the Parent Handbook and on the College website.

- Promoting a supportive and inclusive environment that encourages positive, respectful relationships and communication between staff, students, and parents/guardians. Promoting responsible bystander behaviour amongst students, staff, and parents/carers.

- Establishing multiple accessible reporting channels to ensure that students, bystanders, parents/carers and staff can report alleged bullying easily and safely.

- Conducting regular wellbeing and bullying risk assessments, including anonymous student surveys to identify issues that may not be directly observable to staff.

- Maintaining and analysing records of reported bullying incidents to identify patterns and persistent targets/perpetrators, and to implement targeted prevention strategies where appropriate.

- Using restorative practices, where appropriate, to address bullying behaviours, repair harm, build empathy and support respectful relationship development.

- Including clear anti-bullying statements in students' College diaries, handbooks and Parent Lounge.

- Educating staff, students, and parents/guardians on health conditions, neurodiversity and other differences to foster understanding, reduce stigma and fear, and eliminate (or at least minimise) discriminatory behaviours.

- Displaying anti-bullying digital safety and wellbeing posters strategically within the College to reinforce key messages and support help-seeking.

- Promoting student awareness and a 'no-bullying' environment by participating in events such as the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence and Safer Internet Day.

12 Reporting Bullying

Students and parents/carers are sometimes reluctant to raise bullying incidents, for fear that it will only make matters worse. The College recognises this and is committed to creating a culture in which students feel safe and supported to speak up.

A key part of the College's bullying prevention and intervention strategy is to actively encourage reporting of bullying incidents as well as providing assurance to students who experience bullying (and parents/carers) that:

- Bullying is not tolerated within the College.

- Their concerns will be taken seriously.

- The College has a clear strategy for dealing with bullying concerns.
- Their concerns and the action taken by the College in response will be recorded confidentially on the College's student management system (TASS).

Bullying incidents can be raised with the College verbally or in writing through any of the following avenues:

- A trusted teacher or other staff member.
- House Mentors or primary class teachers
- The Director of Students.
- The Deputy Principal or the Principal.

The College will maintain confidentiality, insofar as possible, and will ensure that students who report bullying are supported, heard, and protected from retaliation.

13 Responding to Bullying

Bullying behaviours vary enormously in their nature, extent and intent. Therefore, each incident needs to be addressed with a considered, contextual and proportionate response. In all circumstances, the College treats bullying concerns seriously.

The College will make reasonable efforts to begin its response within two school days of becoming aware of observed or reported bullying. This does not mean the matter will be resolved within two school days. It means action has started, which may include taking immediate steps to keep students safe, contacting the parents/carers of the students involved to explain next steps, providing initial wellbeing support and, where required, reporting to police or other authorities.

The College will tell the students and parents/carers directly involved what action has been taken, and the reasons for it, to the greatest extent possible while meeting its privacy obligations.

Wellbeing support is available to every student involved in or affected by a bullying incident, including the student who was bullied, the student who engaged in the behaviour and any bystanders. Staff who are affected by, or are responding to, an incident are also supported by the Leadership Executive.

For more information about how the College responds when concerns are raised that students have made mistakes or poor choices, please refer to the *Student Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct*.

A student or parent/carer who is not satisfied with how a bullying concern has been handled may raise the matter under the College's Complaints Handling Policy.

14 How does the College Communicate and Educate to Prevent Bullying?

To demonstrate that the College treats bullying concerns seriously, and has clear strategies for addressing such concerns, the following measures are in place:

- This policy is available on the College website.
- Information for parents/carers: the Parent Handbook, newsletters and the College website include information on the College's approach to creating a positive, respectful and safe learning environment for our students, including how bullying concerns are managed.

- Information about the role played by relevant staff in preventing bullying is included in the Parent Handbook.
- The College displays anti-bullying, digital-safety and wellbeing posters in strategic, high-visibility locations across campus.
- The College reminds students about how and where to seek help, supporting a culture in which bullying is actively challenged and not tolerated.
- Staff and students are educated about bullying prevention and upstander behaviour.
- The College focuses on building the character of the students through the encouragement and development of the virtues.

15 Related Policies

This policy should be read together with the following College documents:

- Student Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct
- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Consequences of Breaching College Rules and Related Policies
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Complaints Handling Policy
- Mobile Phone, Smart Watch and Device Agreement

16 Policy Administration

- Policy owner: Principal
- Version: V2026.
- Date ratified: Tuesday 13 October 2026
- Review: this policy will be reviewed in 2027 and every year after that, in consultation with students, parents/carers and staff