

Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy

Purpose

- (a) The purpose of this policy is to assist the school to create an effective local student engagement policy which provides the basis on which our school develops and maintains safe, supportive and inclusive school environments.

Hillsmeade Primary 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

Hillsmeade Primary School is situated in the South Eastern corridor of Melbourne. With a current enrolment of 800+ students the school is a dynamic and vibrant educational focus for the local community. It is located in Narre Warren South — a south-eastern suburb of Melbourne that is situated 45km from Melbourne's CBD within a growth corridor, currently increasing at the fourth fastest rate in Australia.

Over the last few years, the school has significantly invested in our building and grounds using a mixture of government funding, special grants and parent/community fundraising.

We are committed to providing a child-friendly environment where children feel safe and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives.

Not all children are ready to learn the same thing at the same time in the same way.

At Hillsmeade, we acknowledge this fact and work to personalise our teaching and learning to cater for the individual need of our students. The Hillsmeade Personalised Learning Approach is strongly based on the idea that all children are not ready to learn the same thing at the same time in the same way, therefore we use a research-based pedagogy that personalises and engages students in active learning alongside explicit and formalised instruction.

At Hillsmeade, we recognise the need for children to be active participants in their learning through goal setting, hands-on investigation, questioning and skill practice opportunities. We explicitly teach and develop skills in literacy and numeracy and also encourage the development of vital social, emotional and life skills.

2. School values, philosophy and vision

Mission

To provide a caring, safe and supportive learning environment for children to grow.

Vision

We aim to continually grow and learn together by:

- supporting individual abilities and excellence in academic achievement,
- celebrating diverse backgrounds and cultures, and
- becoming global citizens prepared for the needs and expectations of our ever-changing society.

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Values

Hillsmeade Primary School expects students and staff will show:

✚ Integrity

will be:

✚ Responsible

✚ Enthusiastic

✚ Successful

✚ Persistent

✚ Encouraging

and demonstrate:

✚ Team Work

The school shares the universal values that:

*Every member of the school community has a right to fully participate in an educational environment that is safe, supportive and inclusive.
Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.*

3. Engagement strategies

The school has developed a range of strategies to promote engagement, positive behaviour and respectful relationships for all students in our school. We acknowledge that some students may need extra social, emotional or educational support at school, and that the needs of students will change over time as they grow and learn.

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

Universal

- 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
- welcoming all parents/carers and being responsive to them as partners in learning
- analysing and being responsive to a range of school data such as attendance, Attitudes to School Survey, parent survey data, student management data and school level assessment data
- using an instructional framework to ensure an explicit, common and shared model of instruction ensuring evidenced-based, high yield teaching practices are incorporated into all lessons

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- 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
- incorporating our values into our curriculum and promoted to students, staff and parent/carers so that they are shared and celebrated as the foundation of our school community
- carefully planned transition programs to support students moving into different stages of their schooling
- positive behaviour and student achievement are acknowledged in the classroom, and formally in school assemblies and communication to parents/carers
- monitor student attendance and implement attendance improvement strategies at a whole-school, cohort and individual level
- students have the opportunity to contribute to and provide feedback on decisions about school operations through the Student Representative Council and other forums including year group meetings and Peer Support Groups. Students also are encouraged to speak with their teachers, Year Level Coordinator, Assistant Principal and Principal whenever they have any questions or concerns
- creating opportunities for cross—age connections amongst students through school concerts, athletics, music programs and peer support programs
- encouraging students to self-refer to the Student Wellbeing Coordinator, School Nurse, Assistant Principal and Principal (as appropriate) if they would like to discuss a particular issue or feel as though they may need support of any kind. We are proud to have an ‘open door’ policy where students and staff are partners in learning
- engaging in school wide positive behaviour support with our staff and students, which includes programs such as:
 - Respectful Relationships
 - Bully Stoppers
 - Safe Schools
- programs, incursions and excursions developed to address issue specific behaviour (i.e. anger management programs)
- opportunities for student inclusion (i.e. sports teams, lunchtime activities)
- buddy programs, peer support programs

Targeted

- each year group has a Team Leader, a senior teacher responsible for their year, who monitor the health and wellbeing of students in their year, and act as a point of contact for students who may need additional support
- connect all Koorie students with a Koorie Engagement Support Officer

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- all students in Out-of-Home Care will be appointed a Learning Mentor, have an Individual Learning Plan and will be referred to Student Support Services for an Educational Needs Assessment
- staff will apply a trauma-informed approach to working with students who have experienced trauma

Individual

- Student Support Groups
- Individual Learning Plan and Behaviour Support Plan
- Program for Students with Disabilities
- referral to Student Welfare Coordinator and Student Support Services
- referral to ChildFirst, Headspace
- Navigator
- Lookout

The 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 ChildFirst
 - Re-engagement programs such as Navigator

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

- being responsive and sensitive to changes in the student's circumstances and 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

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- 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

The 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. We 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
- academic performance
- observations by school staff such as changes in engagement, behaviour, self-care, social connectedness and motivation
- attendance data
- suspension data (if applicable)
- 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

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- 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

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 the school's *Bullying Prevention Policy*.

When a student acts in breach of the behaviour standards of our school community, we will institute a staged response, consistent with the Department's Student Engagement and Inclusion Guidelines. Where appropriate, parents/carers will be informed about the inappropriate behaviour and the disciplinary action taken by teachers and other school staff.

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
- restorative practices
- behaviour reviews
- suspension
- expulsion

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Please note: Suspension is a measure of last resort and may only be used in particular situations consistent with Department policy, available at: <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/suspension>

Corporal punishment is prohibited in our school and will not be used in any circumstance. Any form of restraint or seclusion, other than in circumstances described in the school's Restraint & Seclusion Policy also is prohibited.

Bullying Prevention

We strive to foster a school culture that prevents bullying behaviour by modelling and encouraging behaviour that demonstrates acceptance, kindness and respect. We have zero tolerance of bullying including cyberbullying.

Bullying prevention is proactive and is supported by research that indicates that a whole school, multifaceted approach is the most effect way to prevent and address bullying. At our school:

- We have a positive school environment that provides safety, security and support for students and promotes positive relationships and wellbeing.
- We strive to build strong partnerships between the school, families and the broader community that means all members work together to ensure the safety of students.
- Teachers are encouraged to incorporate classroom management strategies that discourage bullying and promote positive behaviour.
- In the classroom, our social and emotional learning curriculum teaches students what constitutes bullying and how to respond to bullying behaviour assertively. This promotes resilience, assertiveness, conflict resolution and problem solving.
- We seek to empower students to be confident communicators and to resolve conflict in a non-aggressive and constructive way.
- Students are encouraged to look out for each other and to talk to teachers and older peers about any bullying they have experienced or witnessed.

Bullying complaints are taken seriously and responded to sensitively at our school.

Students who may be experiencing bullying behaviour, or students who have witnessed bullying behaviour, are encouraged to report their concerns to school staff as soon as possible.

In most circumstances, we encourage students to speak to their class teacher. However, students are welcome to discuss their concerns with any trusted member of staff including teachers, Wellbeing Team, the school social worker etc.].

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Attendance

The school believes all students should attend school all day, every day when the school is open for instruction and is committed to working with its school community to encourage and support full school attendance.

Both the school and parents/carers have an important role to play in supporting students to attend school every day.

Our school will identify individual students or cohorts who are vulnerable and whose attendance is at risk and/or declining and will work with these students and their parents/carers to improve their attendance through a range of interventions and supports.

Parents/carers are expected to communicate with the relevant staff at the school about any issues affecting their child's attendance and work in partnership with the school to address any concerns.

Parents/carers must provide a reasonable explanation for their child's absence from school and endeavour to schedule family holidays, appointments and other activities outside of school hours.

Supporting and promoting attendance

The school promotes student attendance by:

- providing recognition for high attending students
- following up on unapproved non-attenders by communicating to parents/carers on the day of an absence
- publishing newsletter articles outlining the importance of school attendance
- articulating high expectations to all members of the school community by:
 - regularly communicating with parents/carers about expectations for attendance
 - promoting awareness that absence results in quantifiable lost learning time and opportunities
 - modelling punctuality across the whole school
 - creating a safe, supportive learning environment where all students experience success through active participation and engagement in purposeful learning

Recording attendance

The school records student attendance twice daily. This is necessary to:

- meet legislative requirements
- discharge the school's duty of care for all students

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If students are in attendance at a school approved activity, the teacher-in-charge of the activity will record them as being present. This information is then sent to the office where the Admin staff enter in the appropriate code i.e. Camp, Excursion or Special Event.

Recording absences

For absences where there is no exemption in place, a parent/carer must provide an explanation on each occasion to the school, preferably between 8.30 am and 9.00 am.

Parents/Carers should notify the school of absences by:

- contacting the school office via phone, email or SMS
- informing the classroom teacher in writing of an absence

If a student is absent on a particular day and the school has not been previously notified by a parent/carer, or the absence is otherwise unexplained, the school will notify parents by email or SMS by 10:30 am on the day of the absence, requesting notification.

The school will keep a record of the reason given for each absence. The Principal will determine if the explanation provided is a **reasonable excuse** for the purposes of the parent/carer meeting their responsibilities under the *Education Training Reform Act 2006* and the School Attendance Guidelines.

If the school considers that the parent/carer has provided a **reasonable excuse** for their child's absence the absence will be marked as '**Explained**' and the reason given is recorded.

If the school determines that the excuse provided is not reasonable the absence will be marked as '*Parent Choice Unauthorised*'.

The Principal has the discretion to accept a valid reason given by a parent/carer for a student's absence. Generally, the Principal will excuse:

- illness
- medical and dental appointments, where out of hours appointments are not possible or appropriate
- bereavement or attendance at the funeral of a relative or friend of the student, including a student required to attend Sorry Business
- school refusal, if a plan is in place with the parent/carer to address causes and support the student's return to school
- cultural observance if the parent/carer notifies the school in advance
- family holidays where the parent/carer notifies the school in advance

If no explanation is provided by the parent/carer within 10 school days of an absence, it will remain recorded as 'Unexplained' on the student's file.

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Parents/carers will be notified if an absence has not been accepted as excused.

Managing non-attendance and supporting student engagement

Where absences are of concern due to their nature or frequency, or where a student has been absent for more than five days, the school will work collaboratively with parents/carers, the student, and other professionals, where appropriate, to develop strategies to improve attendance, possibly including:

- establishing an Attendance Student Support Group
- implementing a Return to School Plan
- implementing an Individual Education Plan
- implementing a Student Absence Learning Plan for students who will be absent for an extended period
- arranging for assistance from relevant student wellbeing staff in the school.

We understand from time to time that some students will need additional support and assistance, and in collaboration with the student and their family, will endeavour to provide this support when it is required,

7. Engaging with families

We value the input of parents/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/carers in our school community.

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

- ensuring that all parents/carers have access to our school policies and procedures, available on our school website
- maintaining an open, respectful line of communication between parents/carers and staff, supported by our two Communication Policies.
- providing parent/carer volunteer opportunities so that families can contribute to school activities
- involving families with homework and other curriculum-related activities
- 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

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8. Evaluation

The 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.

Before reviewing this wellbeing & engagement policy, the school will gather data from:

- [School information portal](#) (login required)
- [Data Collection and Surveys](#)

[Bullying Data Collection Tool](#)

Further Information and Resources

References:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/student-engagement>
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/suspension>
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/expulsions>
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/behaviour-students>
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/attendance>
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/bullying-prevention-response>

Child Safe References:

PROTECT:

Identify Child Abuse June 2020

Reporting & Legal Obligations June 2020

Reporting Child Abuse – Four Critical Actions June 2020

Creating a Child Safe Environment August 2020

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/child-safe-standards>

Persons reading this Student Wellbeing & Engagement Policy should refer also to the school's:

- *Attendance Policy*
- *Behaviour, Students (DET Overview)*
- *Bullying Prevention & Response Policy*
- *Duty of Care Policy*
- *Inclusion & Diversity Policy*

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- *Digital Learning in Schools Policy*
- *Koorie Education Policy*
- *Protecting Children - Reporting & Other Legal Obligations Policy*
- *Mobile Phones – Students Policy*
- *Restraint & Seclusion*
- *Statement of Values & School Philosophy*
- *Children at Risk Policy*

Review Cycle

This policy, first developed in this format in May 2019 and updated in September 2020, will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle or if guidelines change. The latest DET Student Engagement policy update was mid-June 2020. Behaviour, Student guidelines were updated in June 2020, Attendance guidelines updated in late July 2020 & the Child Safe Standards variously.

Policy mandatory for VRQA purposes

School Council No Longer Approval Required

Regulation 23 requires that the Principal develops the school's Student Wellbeing and Engagement in consultation with the wider community. School Council therefore should be consulted.