



Mernda Hills Christian College

Student Engagement Policy

Document Control

Revision Number	Review Date	Implementation Date	Description of Changes	Prepared By	Approved By
1	Nov 2023	Jan 2024	• New Policy	Exec Leaders	Exec Leaders

Document Type:

Rationale

Mernda Hills Christian College provides a values-based education that focuses on the holistic development of the whole child. The family and the school work harmoniously to provide a consistently positive education for each student to prepare them for meaningful living and lifelong success.

In this context, there is a legislative and moral imperative to ensure there is zero tolerance for any form of child abuse and that the school takes proactive steps to ensure the wellbeing, participation and engagement of all students. We understand that students reach their full potential when they are happy, healthy, engaged in their learning and safe. Our positive school culture, where student participation is encouraged and valued, provides an environment that engages students and supports holistic learning and personal development.

To ensure the health, safety, and overall wellbeing of all students, Mernda Hills Christian College complies with the new Child Safe Standards outlined in Ministerial Order 1359, which sets out the minimum requirements for compliance by Victorian schools with the new Child Safe Standards.

This *Student Engagement Policy* aims to ensure that students and members of our College community understand our:

1. commitment to providing a safe and supportive learning environment for students
2. proactive and intentional supports for vulnerable students
3. clear expectations for positive student behaviour
4. support available to all students and families
5. College's policies and procedures for responding to inappropriate student behaviour

Scope

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

School Profile

Overview

Mernda Hills Christian College is a co-educational school that provides values-based Christian education for students from Foundation to Year 12. As an Adventist School, we prioritise our students holistic development in becoming exceptional young people with the skills to fulfil their God-given potential. Our talented Christian teachers are proud to support students as they pursue excellence, both academically and across a diverse range of co-curricular opportunities available at the college.

Students are encouraged to view themselves as members of a community where they belong, where they can learn more about God and the world around them. Mernda Hills students are supported to establish and maintain respectful relationships with each other and are equipped to demonstrate responsibility for themselves, their learning, and their role as active members of the community.

Delivered within a Christian worldview, education programs at the College align with the Australian Curriculum and meet Victorian Curriculum And Assessment Authority (VCAA) requirements for VCE. Our teachers demonstrate an attitude of lifelong learning in their own professional development and model what this looks like to our students in their learning spaces. Students are supported to see themselves as

lifelong learners, actively engaging in their academic pursuits and remaining curious when exploring new ideas and perspectives.

Whether engaging with stimulating academic content, navigating new friendships, experiencing personal growth through our Learning 4 Life program or competing honourably in our sports program, Mernda Hills Christian College promotes the development of resilience and a growth mindset. These opportunities allow our students to explore new interests and develop their character while discovering how they can flourish and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Philosophy and Purpose

The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education is Christ-centred. We believe that Jesus is the ultimate example of ‘love in action’ and He wants us to do likewise. As such, Adventist Education is a vital ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and is committed to sharing God’s life-transforming love.

We believe that Jesus relates to us on a personal level, presenting His character as the ultimate example. His love and grace are the foundation of our relationship with Him. Therefore, Adventist Education seeks to reveal Jesus and nurture all “... to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8 CSB). We are children of Christ and He says to us all, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” (John 15:4 ESV).

By daily abiding in Jesus, we can find purpose, hope, and joy, even during difficult times.

As such, Adventist Education strives to be transformative. It seeks to impart more than academic knowledge through the balanced development of the whole person: spiritually, mentally, socially, and physically. It seeks to develop a life of faith in God and respect for the dignity of all people. It seeks to guide students “to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other people’s thoughts” (White, E. Education, 1903). It promotes loving service rather than selfish ambition; and it embraces all that is true and good.

Our schools and early learning services seek to be thriving, nurturing, learning communities where Jesus is central, and where our students and young children may become all that God intends them to be.

At Mernda Hills Christian College, our purpose is to transform lives through Adventist Education.

Values

Our **core values** reflect our desire to be a Christ-centred, thriving community where lives are impacted as we reflect God’s character. At Mernda Hills Christian College, we strive to be:

<p style="text-align: center;">Respectful</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“We think about others”</p> <p><i>Love one another warmly as Christians, and be eager to show respect for one another</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Responsible</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“We own our actions”</p> <p><i>No matter what you do, work at it with all your might.</i> - Ecclesiastes 9:10</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Resilient</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“We bounce back”</p> <p><i>Be strong and brave! Don't be afraid and don't panic; for I, the LORD your God, am</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">A Learner</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“We learn and grow”</p> <p><i>For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the</i></p>
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- Romans 12:10		<i>with you in all you do.</i> - Joshua 1:9	<i>endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." - Romans 15:4</i>
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Wellbeing and Engagement

Engaging all students

The College uses a range of strategies to promote engagement, positive behaviour and respectful relationships for all students. 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.

Strategies used to engage all students include:

- high and consistent expectations of all staff, students, parents and carers
- prioritising positive relationships between staff and students and understanding the fundamental role this plays in building and sustaining student wellbeing - including restorative practices
- creating a culture that is inclusive, engaging and supportive and that embraces and celebrates diversity and empowers all students to participate and feel valued
- welcoming parents and carers, and being responsive to them as partners in learning
- analysing and being responsive to a range of school data such as attendance, Insight SRC survey data, student management data
- the delivery of a broad curriculum, including the use of distance education subjects, to ensure that students are able to choose subjects that are tailored to their interests, strengths and aspirations
- the development of an instructional model to ensure an explicit, common and shared model of instruction to ensure that evidenced-based, high-yield teaching practices are incorporated into all lessons
- adopt a broad range of teaching and assessment approaches to effectively respond to the diverse learning styles, strengths and needs of our students
- the explicit teaching of positive behaviours and values through the PB4L program
- our school's Christian worldview and 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 planned transition programs to support students moving into different stages of their schooling
- positive behaviour and student achievement are acknowledged in the classroom, in school assemblies and in communication with parents
- monitor student attendance and implement attendance improvement strategies at a whole-school, year level and individual level
- students have the opportunity to contribute to and provide feedback on decisions about school operations through the Student Representative Council
- students are encouraged to speak with their teachers, wellbeing support team, Heads of School or Principal when they have any questions or concerns

- create opportunities for cross-age connections amongst students through vertical homeroom groups (Secondary), shared facilities, athletics, chapel programs and peer support programs
- all students are welcome to self-refer to the pastoral care team, including Chaplains and Wellbeing Officers
- programs, incursions and excursions developed to address issue-specific needs or behaviour as they arise (i.e. anger management programs or anxiety)
- opportunities for student inclusion (i.e. sports teams, lunchtime activities and clubs)
- buddy programs and peer support programs

Engagement of diverse learners and individuals

Our *Diversity of Learner's Policy* details the ways that a diverse range of learners are supported at the College. Strategies outlined in this policy provide particular support for the needs of students with a disability, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, students who are unable to live at home, international students, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) students.

In addition to these strategies, the College 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 students 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
- developing an Attendance Improvement Plan for students with low attendance rates, in consultation with families and in alignment with the *Attendance Policy*
- considering if any environmental changes need to be made, eg. changing the classroom layout
- referring the student to:
 - school-based wellbeing supports
 - appropriate external supports such as council-based youth and family services, other allied health professionals, headspace, child and adolescent mental health services or ChildFirst
- Where necessary the College 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
 - monitoring individual student attendance and developing an Attendance Improvement Plan 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
 - with other complex needs that require ongoing support and monitoring

Identifying students in need of support

Mernda Hills is committed to providing the necessary support to ensure our students are supported

academically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. Teaching and support staff, as well as the wellbeing and chaplaincy teams, play a significant role in identifying students who may need additional support. The pastoral care team (Wellbeing and Chaplaincy where appropriate) develop and implements strategies to help identify students in need of support and enhance student wellbeing. The following information and tools are used 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, PB4L concerns and other behaviour data - including suspensions
- engagement with families
- self-referrals or referrals from peers

Rights and responsibilities

All members of our College 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, abiding by our College values and *Codes of Conduct*. In alignment with the rights outlined in *The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, 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, racism, 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 our values of respect, responsibility, resilience and a learner mindset. Specifically, this includes a responsibility to:
 - respect 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. Further information about raising a complaint or concern is available in our *Community Complaints and Appeals Policy*.

Student behaviour and expectations

Behaviour expectations for students at Mernda Hills Christian College are founded in our Christian context and college values. Positive behaviours are taught explicitly through the Positive Behaviour 4 Learning program, and the *Student Code of Conduct* and *Student Behaviour Policy* outline appropriate and unacceptable student behaviours.

Violence, bullying, and other offensive and harmful behaviours such as racism, harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated and will be managed in accordance with the documents outlined above, as well as the *Anti-Bullying Policy*, the *Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policy* and the *ICT Acceptable Use Agreement*.

Staff response to inappropriate student behaviour occurs in a staged, values-focused approach, with the aim to repair and restore relationships where possible. The initial stages of this process are explained in the *Student Handbook* and the *Student Behaviour Policy*. Behaviours of significant concern and gross misconduct, as outlined in the *Student Code of Conduct*, are managed with procedural fairness in accordance with the *Suspension and Expulsion Policy*.

Corporal punishment is prohibited by law and will not be used in any circumstance at our College.

Engagement with families

The College values the input of parents and carers, and 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, working hard to create successful partnerships with parents and carers by:

- ensuring that all parents have access to relevant policies and procedures, available on our school website and through the Seqta parent portal
- maintaining an open, respectful line of communication between parents and staff, supported by our *Respectful Behaviours Policy* and *Parent Code of Conduct*
- providing parent volunteer opportunities and appropriate training so that families can contribute to school activities
- involving families with homework and other curriculum-related activities
- coordinating resources and services from the community for families
- including families in Student Support Groups and developing individual plans for students

Review and Evaluation

Mernda Hills Christian College collects data annually to understand the wellbeing of our students, to measure the success or otherwise of our school-based strategies and identify emerging trends or needs.

Sources of data that are reviewed on an annual basis include:

- student survey data - Insight SRC
- incidents data
- school reports
- parent survey data - Insight SRC
- attendance and absence data

The College also regularly monitors available data, in particular, through Seqta, to ensure any wellbeing or engagement issues are acted upon in a timely manner and any intervention occurs as soon as possible.

This policy will be reviewed as part of regular policy reviews every 3 years, as new guidelines or legislation becomes relevant, or if changes are required in light of annual data reviews.

Related Policies and Processes

- Attendance Policy
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Diversity of Learners Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policy
- IT Acceptable Use Agreement
- Student Behaviour Policy
- Suspension and Expulsion Policy
- Student Code of Conduct
- Community Complaints and Appeals Policy
- Student Handbook
- Respectful Behaviours Policy
- Parent Code of Conduct

Relevant Documentation or Legislation

- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
- Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012
- Disability Standards for Education 2005
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)
- Crimes Act 1958 (VIC)
- The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006