

Workplace Harassment Policy

Background:

The School already has clear guidelines for effective communication and guidelines on the prevention of bullying. As well, the school conforms to existing State and Commonwealth government legislation on Workplace Health and Safety, Sexual Harassment and Anti Discrimination. This Information Statement for Staff will respond to new legislation on Workplace Harassment.

Definitions:

Workplace Harassment occurs when a person is subjected to repeated behaviour by another person that is unwelcome and unsolicited and which is reasonably considered to be offensive, intimidating, humiliating or threatening.

Such behaviour may include [but is not limited to] the following:

- Abusing a person loudly.
- Constant ridicule.
- Offensive e-mail or telephone messages.
- Maliciously excluding and isolating a person from workplace activities.

Please note that by definition, workplace harassment is not a “one off” thing. By the definitions above, the action is repeated or constant. Workplace Harassment does not refer to reasonable management action such as performance appraisal and management control of an employee’s work production.

The Work Place Culture:

Trinity Anglican School has identified the kind of workplace that it intends to be. These ideals are expressed in our Mission Statement, in our Strategic Plan and in the Anglican Ethos Statement. These values should inform everything that we do and say as an organisation.

These values must be implemented, however, in a very busy work environment where there is sometimes considerable pressure to complete tasks within time frameworks and with limited resources. While the culture of the school is friendly and essentially egalitarian, there is a hierarchy of responsibility and supervision to manage the work process. The school is certainly a very demanding place in terms of commitment and in terms of the standards set for the team and individuals. Given this pressure, there is the potential for occasional conflict and confrontation.

The expectation is that this conflict will be managed in a professional way and in a way consistent with the essential values of the school. Here are some of the signal features of the school culture that should be fostered in the creation of a positive working environment:

Inclusiveness:

All the school staff – at whatever level – are valued members of the team. All members of staff are entitled to be treated with the courtesy that respects the dignity of each individual. All staff have the same rights to privacy and to respect for difference. This inclusiveness is demonstrated by the impartial application of leave arrangements, fee discounts for children, access to appropriate professional development, access to senior staff and inclusion in school social functions.

Democracy:

Decision making in the school is generally consultative and there is a strong emphasis on service as a dimension of leadership. This commitment to democracy is demonstrated by open decision making, the consultation accompanying innovation and the respect for difference.

Friendliness and warmth in the workplace:

The school has a warm, friendly atmosphere illustrated in the positive relationships between students, staff and parents. All of the senior professional staff are also teachers with their own deadlines to meet, their own reports to write and their own classes to meet punctually.

All employees have the right to work in an environment which is safe, which respects their dignity, their privacy and their integrity.

For all this, the school is still a workplace made up of over a hundred people – all of them but men and women who have the range of human failings and temptations to test them. They will become tired; they will have off days when they are unwell but still at work; they will be distracted by private and personal issues; they will find themselves rubbing up against someone with whom they don't feel comfortable. There are also tensions in the workplace that are obviously based on unequal power relationships. Employees may feel uncomfortable and disempowered when a supervisor engages in conduct which may be considered to be "bossy". The procedures outlined below are designed to manage those conflicts so that the essentially positive features of the workplace can be preserved and conflicts can be managed in an appropriate way consistent with the requirements of State and Commonwealth legislation.

In the case of Workplace Harassment

Here is a set of responses to situations which employees may feel comes under the definition of Workplace Harassment. In attempting to resolve the issue, staff would do well to begin with the first alternatives rather than go straight to the last resorts.

Step 1: Be assertive.

When an employee feels that he or she is being harassed under the definition given above, the first step is to communicate that sense to the offender. Be specific in your feedback. You can use the classic "I message" to do this: eg "When you criticise my work in front of others, then I really feel humiliated and I lose my confidence." When a person does not feel confident about doing this verbally, they can write a note, memo or e-mail to the person, focussing on how the offender's clearly described behaviour makes you feel. In many cases, people who make others uncomfortable in this way lack the sensitivity to understand how their behaviour impacts on others. At the same time, exchanges like this can help to overcome genuine misunderstandings on the part of the person who may feel harassed.

Step 2: Talk the matter over with a supervisor.

with the person's response are an important tool for supervisors seeking to resolve the matter.

Personal assertiveness:

While it is important that there is a process in place to respond to incidents of workplace harassment, the most effective response to the situation is for individual members of staff to be assertive when problems arise. Sorting out problems early and in an informal way is much better than formal procedures to resolve problems when they have become serious.