



SOPHIA
MUNDI

The Inner City Steiner School P-12

Student Engagement and Wellbeing Policy

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1. Policy Background

1.1 Definition

Student engagement and wellbeing can be defined as three interrelated components: behavioural, emotional and cognitive.

- **Behavioural engagement** refers to students' participation in education, including the academic, social and extracurricular activities of the school.
- **Emotional engagement** encompasses students' emotional reactions in the classroom and in the school. It can be defined as students' sense of belonging or connectedness to the school.
- **Cognitive engagement** relates to students' investment in learning and their intrinsic motivation and self-regulation.

Student engagement has a significant impact on both the quality and opportunity for learning. Since it underpins effective student learning and positive behaviour, it needs to be a community wide responsibility. Lack of engagement can arise through individual, social, emotional or physical factors, related to school, family or community.

Sophia Mundi aims to create a positive school culture to ensure that students feel valued and cared for, have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the school and can effectively engage with their learning. We aim to be inclusive, recognising and responding to the diverse needs of our students, accommodating different learning profiles and rates of learning and intervening early to identify and respond to individual student needs.

Many young people encounter learning difficulty during their school life and need to be supported by targeted strategies. Sophia Mundi has established processes to identify and intervene early when an individual student is at risk of disengaging from learning or from school. Our teachers have a responsibility to respond when students experience difficulty with their schooling and will be supported by a whole-school approach to student support.

1.2 Relevant Legislation

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*
- *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*
- *Information Privacy Act 2000*

1.3 Background

1.3.1 *Creating a Positive School Culture*

Sophia Mundi aims to create a positive school culture that is fair and respectful. Particular focus is placed on establishing positive and respectful relationships, particularly between teachers and students and establishing a learning community that provides multiple and diverse opportunities for students to experience success.

Positive relationships with teachers are important to students. A key strength of the Steiner pedagogy is its recognition of students as individuals. Sophia Mundi acknowledges the diversity of its student population as central to creating a positive and inclusive school culture. Engagement and wellbeing strategies are incorporated into the school ethos and curriculum so students are more likely to attend school and participate in a meaningful way.

1.3.2 Building a Safe and Supportive School Environment

Building a safe and supportive school environment is essential to student engagement and wellbeing. Students can only learn effectively in environments in which they feel safe and supported and where their teachers have high expectations for their learning. Sophia Mundi has developed a range of policies to promote student well-being including Student Healthcare, Emergency Management, School Security Policy etc.

Sophia Mundi has also developed a Behaviour Management Policy as a respectful whole-school behaviour management system. This whole-school system is based on pro-social values, social competencies, incentives and positive peer relationships. Teamwork and respect are core values of the school philosophy.

Sophia Mundi class teachers aim to involve and engage all students, set high expectations, seek feedback from students.

Continuity of class teacher for the primary years and close teacher cooperation and teamwork during the middle school years minimises student anxiety, increases resilience and ensures students transition successfully between year levels.

1.3.3 Expecting Positive, Supportive and Respectful Relationships that Value Diversity

Sophia Mundi is an inclusive school with a strong moral purpose. It is imperative that all staff, students, parents/guardians and members of the whole-school community exhibit positive relationships and value difference, as this supports both a positive school environment and effective classroom learning.

Continuity of classroom teacher over the primary years enables Sophia Mundi teachers to better know their students and understand their learning needs. They are able to adapt current pedagogical knowledge and thinking and apply it in different ways, so that each student is engaged in meaningful learning experiences.

Expecting positive and supportive relationships that value diversity between students, their peers, teachers and the whole-school community encourages students to take personal responsibility for participation in their education and enables them to provide support and model positive behaviours to other students. Sophia Mundi, through its carer network, Parents and Friends Group and other volunteer parental networks, provides multiple opportunities for parents/guardians and members of the broader community to play an active part in the life of the school and the education of their children.

1.3.4 Promoting Pro-Social Values and Behaviours

Promoting and teaching pro-social values and behaviours helps young people to engage with school, their peers, their teachers and their learning. Sophia Mundi has clear expectations of individual responsibility to foster positive relationships among students.

Sophia Mundi has adopted The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), which includes the learning domain of Physical, Personal and Social Learning. VELs encourages students to work with others, and to take greater responsibility for their own learning and participation at school.

In the context of VELs, the school curriculum includes pro-social values and behaviour to enable students to acquire knowledge and skills, value diversity and build a culture of learning, community and engagement.

1.3.5 Encouraging Student Participation

So that students feel valued and empowered, Sophia Mundi encourages active and meaningful student participation and provides students with opportunities to contribute and provide feedback to the school.

Meaningful involvement of students means input of ideas, opinions, knowledge and experiences throughout education. Sophia Mundi aims to provide opportunity for students to become active participants in their education, including involvement in decisions about what and how they learn, and how their learning is assessed.

Sophia Mundi will investigate ways for all students to participate directly in the development of the Student Engagement Policy to promote active student participation and provide students with a sense of ownership of their environment.

1.3.6 Proactively Engaging with Parents

Sophia Mundi invites involvement of parents and families to provide an environment that openly engages all families as equal partners in the education of children and young people. Staff aim to create a welcoming culture for families and together we aim to foster high parent/family expectations for the school's performance for their children.

Sophia Mundi aims to support families to engage in their child's learning and build their capacity as active learners. In providing an environment that welcomes all parents and is responsive to them as partners in learning, we can ensure that the unique experiences and skills of students' families enrich the learning environment and the school community.

Keys to successful partnerships with parents/families include:

- ensuring all parents are aware of the school's *Student Engagement Policy*;
- conducting effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications;
- providing volunteer opportunities to enable parents/guardians and students to contribute;
- involving families with homework and other curriculum-related activities;
- involving families as participants in some aspects of school decision-making;
- coordinating resources and services from the community for families, students and the school; and
- providing opportunities to enhance parenting knowledge and skills.

1.3.7 Implementing Preventative and Early Intervention Approaches

Sophia Mundi's *Student Engagement Policy* includes preventative and early intervention strategies to support student engagement and address individual barriers to learning

Prevention strategies aim to target the whole school community and are designed to reduce any risk factors that may contribute to attendance or behavioural issues. They are based on the school's knowledge of the community and students' needs and therefore provide a solid platform for inclusive educational provision. To ensure proper care, safety and protection of its students Sophia Mundi has also established a Child Protection policy.

Effective early intervention strategies enable early identification of vulnerable students and those at risk of disengagement from school. Early intervention is focused on groups that are at higher risk of harm or disengagement from education, and aims to improve their resilience through effective and appropriate support. Strategies are targeted at students displaying inappropriate coping skills, stress reactions, depressive symptoms and other personal and social vulnerabilities.

A comprehensive understanding of the whole-school community and of the wellbeing and/or learning issues that students may be experiencing provides the foundation for an inclusive and positive school culture.

1.3.8 Responding to Individual Students

Sophia Mundi has appointed a Welfare Officer to support class teachers and class guardians in responding to individual students who require additional emotional assistance and support.

For students with special needs, special programs will be planned within Sophia Mundi involving whole school structures and classroom based approaches. Program support groups including the parent/carer may be formed to develop individual learning plans – a document which links the specific needs of the student to our curriculum.

1.3.9 Linking to the Local Community

Linking with the local community gives schools access to an extended network of community members and professionals and educators who can provide expertise and experience that can build the capacity of schools and teachers to respond to the needs of their students.

Children and young people with a meaningful connection to the broader community tend to be more resilient in the face of problems and stress. Partnerships between schools and community-based service providers involve an acceptance of shared responsibility for addressing common areas of concern and a collaborative approach to developing strategies to reach goals. These partnerships can also provide optimum service delivery for vulnerable students.

1.3.10 School Strategic Planning Process

The *Student Engagement Policy* is reviewed during the strategic planning process to ensure that school strategic and annual implementation plans continue to reflect changing approaches to student engagement, attendance and positive behaviour. It will also ensure that the goals, targets and key improvement strategies within these plans reflect the key principles and support the prevention and early intervention focus of a *Student Engagement Policy*.

The wider strategic planning process provides for development of long-term targets for student engagement and wellbeing, which are linked to short-term actions. These actions will assist in the implementation of the school's vision and should be known and understood by the whole-school community. Review of measures to promote student engagement and wellbeing is crucial to supporting a culture of continuous improvement.

3 Student Engagement Policy

3.1 School Profile Statement

Sophia Mundi is a school of approximately 180 students located on the NE boundary of Melbourne's Central Business District within the Abbotsford Convent Arts precinct and next door to the Collingwood Children's Farm. This offers students a peaceful and secure environment in which to learn, yet one which offers a vibrant surrounding.

The school offers the full Steiner curriculum to Class 10 and from 2012 we plan to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme for Classes 11 and 12. This unique educational offering marries the richness of Steiner education with the IB contributing an internationally recognised benchmark qualification. Our pedagogy is designed to stimulate the imagination and is tailored to the learning needs of the individual. This approach encourages student engagement.

Our students are drawn from a wide geographical area, with many coming from Melbourne's inner eastern suburbs. They represent all parts of the economic spectrum. Our curriculum and pedagogy is suited to a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and our mix of students reflects the cultural and ethnic richness of the surrounding population. The school is supported by a strong parent community and maintains a belief that we all share in the education of our children. We encourage an active lifestyle, healthy eating – organic/biodynamic food where possible - and sustainability. We try to use natural and recycled materials. And we encourage parents to participate in support of the school.

We celebrate a range of festivals, particularly those in response to seasonal changes. It is commonplace within our school to see colourful dancing, live music, drama, games, singing, puppetry and storytelling.

The school is working to further enrich its curriculum and range of subjects by strengthening its relationships with the neighbouring artistic community, Aboriginal groups and the adjacent Collingwood Children's Farm. Increased use of the Yarra River and its cycle paths for PE are also anticipated.

The school has a strong teaching group of around 19 full-time equivalent teachers who work supportively together and provide a warm, caring environment for the students.

3.2 Student Community Engagement Committee (SCEC)

There is a Student Community Engagement Committee (SCEC) which meets regularly to assist two way communications between the Board and the Community and to help provide community input to the annual school planning process. This group also assists where appropriate with the Student Representative Council.

See appendices A and B.

3.3 Whole-School Prevention Statement

3.2.1 School Culture

The foundation of our positive school culture is the Steiner pedagogy and curriculum with the active participation of members of the school community. Parents are encouraged to study the Steiner philosophy, volunteer to become class carers, support the school through the Parents and Friends group or participate in a range of volunteer activities including working bees, school canteen and so forth. Parents can join students and teachers in local walks and excursions in and around the convent grounds. There are also regular adult craft activities available to parents and after-school barbeques.

Though the school is non-denominational, it celebrates a range of different religious and cultural festivals. This encourages acceptance and understanding of difference and cultural respect.

3.2.2 Prevention Programmes

Attendance

Sophia Mundi recognises full attendance is key to student engagement. More detailed recording of reasons for absence has been introduced in 2010 and attendance levels by class are to be regularly reviewed by the School Management Team. Meetings between the parents and class teachers/guardians will be arranged where attendance levels and reasons for absence indicate early signs of lack of engagement or other difficulties.

Literacy and Numeracy

Sophia Mundi's Support Ed department assesses all students for learning difficulties regularly. Those found in need may be offered "extra lesson" tuition and individual learning plans.

Inclusion, Wellbeing and Transitions

Transition issues at Sophia Mundi are minimal due to the extended class teacher period (where students keep the same class teacher), which typically ranges from 6 to 8 years. A dedicated team of middle school teachers and guardians supports the transition to middle school in years 7-9.

Professional Learning

Both Primary and Secondary faculty devote time to "child study". This is an in-depth review, led by the class teacher or guardian, of any student.

Support of Positive Behaviour and Relationships

The school seeks involvement of parents in the learning and behaviour of each student by fostering a co-operative approach through reports, class-parent meetings, phone calls and the like. Where necessary, the school will form a student support group involving the class teacher and a member of Support Ed.

3.4 Rights and Responsibilities

School Community

Every member of the school community has a right to fully participate in an education environment that is safe, supportive and inclusive and be treated with respect and dignity, free from all forms of discriminatory behaviour, harassment, bullying, vilification, violence, intimidation, abuse and exclusion.

Every member of the school community has a responsibility to participate and contribute to a positive learning environment

Students

All students have the right to learn and socialise without interference or intimidation in a safe and secure environment with the opportunity to offer ideas, opinions, knowledge and experiences of the educational process.

All students have the responsibility to be prepared to learn and explore their full potential while respecting the rights of others.

Staff

All staff have the right to work in an atmosphere of order and co-operation and use their professional discretion to resolve conflicts within the wider framework of school policies and procedures.

All staff have the responsibility to build positive relationships with students as a basis for engagement and learning, to use and manage school resources to create a stimulating, safe and meaningful learning environment and treat all members of the school community with respect, fairness and dignity.

Parents

All parents have the right to know their children are in a safe, happy learning environment where they are treated fairly.

All parents have the responsibility to build positive relationships with members of the school community and ensure students attend school and have the appropriate learning materials.

3.5 Shared Expectations

Sophia Mundi has developed shared expectations which are intended to be positive in that they set out what are expected behaviours for our school community. Our shared expectations are intended to support individual students and families that come to our community from a diversity of backgrounds, communities and experiences.

Staff

Staff are expected, within the context of the wider Steiner curriculum and pedagogy, to:

- Ensure the school complies with its duty of care obligations to its students including student wellbeing at the centre of school business.
- Adopt flexible, inclusive teaching styles to engage different learners
- Deliver curriculum and assessment that challenges and extends student learning
- Provide opportunities for student input and engagement into educational processes
- Develop meaningful relationship with students to promote education and well-being
- Negotiate class-based shared expectations of behaviour
- Promote regular attendance by students and follow up absences
- Monitor student behaviour issues and the effectiveness of implemented strategies
- Involve the School Welfare Officer and/or external specialists where necessary

Students

Students are expected, within the context of the wider Steiner curriculum and pedagogy, to:

- Take an increasing responsibility for their own learning and participation as members of the whole school community. This involves developing as individual learners who increasingly manage their own learning and growth by setting goals and managing resources to achieve these goals.
- Have high expectations they can learn.
- Participate fully in the school's educational program, including camps and music, and to attend regularly.
- Display positive behaviours that demonstrate respect for themselves, their peers, their teachers and all other members of the school community.
- Understand that bullying, violence, property damage, inappropriate language and disruption of the learning of others is unacceptable.

Parents

Parents of Students are expected, within the context of the wider Steiner curriculum and pedagogy, to:

- Ensure enrolment details for their children are correct
- Ensure their children regularly attend school and to advise the school of absenteeism in a timely manner.
- Promote positive educational outcomes for their children by taking an active interest in their child's educational progress and wellbeing including regular and constructive communication with school staff.
- Actively support their child's engagement in the school environment by attendance at festivals, performances and other student activities.
- Support the school in maintaining a safe and respectful learning environment for all students.
- Work with staff to promote a consistent approach to discipline both in and out of school.

3.6 School Actions and Consequences

Sophia Mundi aims to acknowledge students who meet the shared expectations outlined in this policy through recognition and encouragement

When students do not meet shared expectations and adopt inappropriate behaviours, the school adopts a staged response in accordance with its discipline policy.

Strategies, which may be adopted by the school to address inappropriate behaviour, include:

- Discussion of the behaviour and reaching agreement for future behaviour
- Explicit teaching of appropriate behaviours
- Allowing a student time out or a cooling off period
- Withdrawal from an activity to an alternative within the school
- Counselling from the Welfare Officer
- Formation of a Student Support Group to involve staff, parents and potentially outside help
- Detentions
- Suspension and Expulsion for serious disciplinary issues

Appendix A Student Community Engagement Committee (SCEC) Overview

The SCEC arose from a meeting held by the Sophia Mundi Parents and Friends Association on the 20/10/09. The meeting was to discuss the future direction of the school and engaging with the parent community. What came out of this meeting was a recommendation that a permanent subcommittee of the School Board be established to provide a communication 'conduit' for all stakeholders – students, teachers, parents, the board, administration – and be responsible for the work surrounding the school plan. Robyn Dexter was asked to take this recommendation to the Board for approval.

The Board invited interested current or past parents to join the Community Engagement Committee and the first meeting was held in April 2010.

The name Student and Community Engagement Committee (SCEC) was adopted by the subcommittee. It has six members from the wider school community, including current and past parents.

The Terms of Reference from the Board was that the Committee would be the communication conduit between the School Board and the wider school community - current and past parents/guardians and current students of the school - providing a means of communication between the Board and wider school community.

The initial work of the SCEC was to inform the community about its role, introduce the committee and research the issues and concerns that the current school community have about the school. The SCEC also spoke with the teachers about creating a senior student council and having a representative of the students on the SCEC.

At the moment the SCEC is very involved in the campaigning and lobbying for building facilities for the school.

Appendix B Terms of Reference for the Student Community Engagement Committee

1. ROLE

- 1.1** The Student and Community Engagement Committee (“SCEC”) is a subcommittee of the Sophia Mundi Inner City Steiner School Board (“School Board”).
- 1.2** The primary purpose of the SCEC is to be the communication conduit between School Board and the wider school community and ensure that parents are active participants within the school community by:
- Providing a means of communication for the wider school community to the School Board.
 - Providing a means of communication for the School Board to the wider school community of Sophia Mundi Inner City Steiner School.
 - Providing parents the opportunity to contribute to the decisions made by the School Board.
 - Providing voluntary opportunities to enable the wider community to contribute for the greater good of the school community.
 - Supporting school parent groups in their endeavours to assist, participate, and contribute to curriculum and non-curriculum related activities.
 - {Education and speakers for parents}
- 1.3** As a subcommittee reporting to the School Board, this SCEC is intended to be permanent.

2. COMPOSITION

- 2.1** The composition of the SCEC will include a Board member, school members and/or a representative of the wider community.
- 2.2** SCEC members may be nominated by the Principal and / or the School Board and will be approved by the SCEC.
- 2.3** A Chair (“SCEC Chair”) is to be selected before the first meeting each calendar year. The SCEC Chair will serve a term of 12 months with effect from the first SCEC meeting in the calendar year until the first meeting of the SCEC the following year.
- 2.4** SCEC members shall be appointed for an initial term of one calendar year.
- 2.5** Membership of the SCEC shall be reviewed annually, or as determined by the School Board.

3 MEETINGS

- 3.1** The SCEC will meet as frequently as required but not less than four times per year.
- 3.2** A notice of each meeting confirming the date, time, venue and agenda shall be forwarded to each member of the SCEC five working days prior to the date of the meeting. The notice for SCEC members will include relevant supporting papers for the agenda items to be discussed if necessary. The SCEC Chair shall determine the agenda for each meeting of the SCEC.
- 3.3** The quorum for a meeting of the SCEC is {three} members.
- 3.4** Minutes of proceedings and resolutions of the SCEC shall be taken by the person appointed by the SCEC to act as secretary of the SCEC.
- 3.5** All minutes and resolutions of the SCEC shall be kept and maintained by the SCEC Secretary to ensure accurate records of the SCEC are available.
- 3.6** Minutes shall be distributed to all SCEC after approval has been given by the SCEC Chair.

4. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1** SCEC members are expected to fulfil their duties in a professional and timely manner and with due regard to the professional requirements of the School Board.
- 4.2** SCEC members are expected to attend SCEC meetings. If a member does not regularly attend scheduled meetings, the SCEC Chair has the right to ask a member why he or she should remain on the SCEC.
- 4.3** In the course of participation in the SCEC activities, members may receive information that is confidential and/or subject to the protection of privacy legislation (e.g. membership information). All information is considered to be the information of the School Board and therefore not able to be used without the permission of the School Board. SCEC members will be advised by School Board which items of information are confidential or subject to privacy requirements. SCEC members are required to maintain the confidentiality of this information at all times and to use the information only to advance the work of the SCEC and School Board and not for any personal or commercial objectives.
- 4.4** SCEC Terms of Reference, membership and key activities will be published on the School website.

5. PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

- 5.1** The SCEC shall assess SCEC effectiveness periodically having regard to its objectives as stated in the Terms of Reference.
- 5.2** The SCEC Terms of Reference shall be reviewed as required by the School Board and amended as appropriate.