

Student Wellbeing, Inclusion and Engagement Policy

Ratification Date: Update by RNS Principal 03/2023 RNS Board 15/03/2023	Next Review: By 1 July 2024 or after an event or changes to the minimum standards as advised by the VRQA	Availability: <table><tr><td>Web</td><td>X</td></tr><tr><td>Office</td><td>X</td></tr><tr><td>On Request</td><td>X</td></tr></table>	Web	X	Office	X	On Request	X	Actions:
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PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all students and members of our school community understand:

- (a) our commitment to providing a safe and supportive learning environment for students
- (b) expectations for positive student behaviour
- (c) support available to students and families
- (d) our school's policies and procedures for responding to inappropriate student behaviour.

River Nile School (RNS) 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, where student participation is encouraged and valued, 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 background and profile

The River Nile School (RNS) grew out of the River Nile Learning Centre (RNLC), which was established in 2006 to assist the African refugee community. It commenced with after-hours tutorials in a hall in Footscray, and from those small beginnings grew substantially to meet the education needs of other disadvantaged members of our community. From 2008 to 2016, the entity delivered a Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program through a Department of Education and Training (DET), Victoria, Partnership via a Memorandum of Understanding with Mount Alexander College, however a key challenge was that this only covered 1.7 FTE VCAL teachers' salaries and never contributed to any other core operating costs.

The opportunity to address this challenge by becoming an Independent School, so it could become self-sufficient in covering core operating costs, to enable it to continue to meet the steady demand for its quality multicultural education service was identified, developed and led in 2016 by the then RNLC Director, Lisa Wilson, supported by the then Secretary, Treasurer and Welfare Director, John O'Shea, teaching team and former Committee of Management. Following more than six months of planning and revising of Policies and Programs our goal was realized in December 2016 when the VRQA (Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority) granted registration of the River Nile School Inc as a senior secondary, specialist, single sex (girls only) school with VCAA (Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority) approval to deliver Foundation, Intermediate and Senior VCAL curriculum. As part of the process to become a school, the entity changed its name to the River Nile School (RNS). It began operating as a registered, independent school in January 2017, with Lisa Wilson becoming its inaugural or Foundation Principal and with RNLC teaching staff from 2016 employed under the entities prior operation remaining with the new school.

The school delivers Applied Learning curriculum, to young women from refugee backgrounds, who have had disrupted schooling, are struggling to cope with mainstream school or find our setting more suited to their needs. We are also a registered charitable organisation that delivers everything we do with our students for free (known in legislation as 'zero contribution' school) – including a comprehensive school program, free onsite childcare for students of pre-school aged children, comprehensive welfare supports, a notebook computer, MYKI public transport cards, and a comprehensive co-curricular program (swimming, camps, excursions/incursions) – all for free and with the primary objective of removing barriers to educational engagement.

All students who attend RNS have English as an Additional Language (EAL) so developing student levels of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) is a central focus. From 2023 we offer the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Vocational Major (VM) and Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) curriculum. RNS provides a high-challenge, high-support learning environment with a strengths-based approach. We offer small class sizes and teachers and student support staff work collaboratively to achieve the best possible outcomes for each student with individualised learning plans and wellbeing programs for all students. RNS adopts a holistic model for supporting the unique educational and support needs of each student, so developing strong student-staff relationships is essential. As our students come from backgrounds where they may have experienced significant complex trauma, we adopt a trauma-informed (healing) approach in our practice.

The young women at the River Nile School are aged 15 – 20+ years, from refugee, asylum seeker or disadvantaged new arrivals backgrounds and all are EAL learners. Our student cohort is at the lowest end of the socio-disadvantage profile and among the most marginalised and isolated in our community. Some are preliterate or have limited prior years in education, while some have attended school but have limited English language and literacy. All have an interest in learning, but many have struggled in mainstream education settings and have either stopped attending or been excluded. Our programs aim to re-engage our students in their own measurable, visible academic growth, simultaneously teaching them strategies to become independent and autonomous learners in their schooling, pathway choices and adulthood.



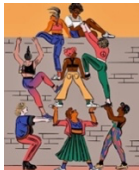

The wellbeing, health and safety of our students is the foundation of the River Nile School approach to student management and we are committed to and commit significant resources to student engagement, inclusion, wellbeing and advocacy. We embrace a Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) model as most of our students have experienced complex trauma, by the experiences that caused them to become refugees. Models of TIP show the importance of collaborating to support young people and their families who have experienced trauma. Our school environment is safe, professional, welcoming and orderly. Students often refer to it as being their home. Staff are seen as positive role models of relationships, actions and behaviours. We have a strong focus on consistent predictable routines to improve a sense of safety and security and limit triggers associated with the fight or flight stress response.

We are proud of our diverse and inclusive school community. We strive to provide a nurturing and challenging environment that empowers students to reach their full potential, academically and socially.

2. School values, philosophy and mission

Our mission is to **empower young refugee and asylum seeker women through education**, to acquire the language, life and work skills to integrate and thrive in our community.

Our River Nile School values guide and philosophy inform our decision making and actions. Promoting River Nile School values especially that relationships are respectful and tolerant and creating a culture that is inclusive, engaging and supportive is fundamental. Our River Nile School values and what they mean to our students and staff:

 Empowering Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We believe education is a human right and can positively transform lives.• We will support you to develop and achieve personalised goals and skills for life.• We will model and demonstrate. We won't just tell you how, we will show you how.• Empowering education is student-centred, interactive and promotes independence. It gives students the opportunity to influence the themes, issues and knowledge they investigate.
 Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We promise to treat you with respect and unconditional positive regard. We accept and support our students and community members for who they are.• We care about and are kind to each other.• We recognise and celebrate achievements.
 Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every student should feel safe, included and a sense of belonging at our school.• We value people's differences and unique qualities.• Everyone has a right to have their voice heard.• We acknowledge the importance of each person's heritage, traditions, identity, needs and aspirations.
 Courage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We speak up for what is right and will advocate for our students.• Our students are willing to have a go, face fears and try again after set-backs.• We will support our students to think about their sense of right and wrong, so that they can pursue social justice, equity and fairness in life.• Every student at our school has a story of resilience, courage and hope. They have shown immense bravery and faced many fears in fleeing harm in their birth country and coming to Australia. These strengths will help them build a safer and brighter future.

River Nile School's values and philosophy are integral to the work that we do and is the foundation of our school community. All students, staff and members of our school community are encouraged to live, demonstrate and role model our core values at every opportunity.

3. Wellbeing and engagement strategies

River Nile School has developed a range of strategies to promote engagement, an inclusive and safe environment, positive behaviour, and respectful relationships for all students in our school. We recognise the importance of student friendships and peer support in helping children and students feel safe and less isolated. 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 (group specific) and individual engagement strategies used by our school is included below:

Universal

- High and consistent expectations of all staff, students and parents/carers.
- Prioritise 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 and that embraces and celebrates diversity and empowers all students to participate and feel valued.
- 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 feedback, student management data and school level assessment data.
- Deliver a broad curriculum including the VCE Vocational Major (VM), Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC), VET programs, Health and Wellbeing, Workplace Learning and Co-curricular programs to ensure that students have choice in subjects and programs and a say in their learning, tailored to their interests, strengths and aspirations.
- Teachers at RNS use an EAL and Applied Learning instructional framework, through a Trauma-informed Practice (TIP) lens, to ensure an explicit, common and shared model of instruction to ensure that evidenced-based, high-yield teaching practices are incorporated into all lessons.
- Teachers at River Nile School adopt 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
- Our school's Statement of Values and School Philosophy are incorporated into our curriculum and promoted to students, staff, parents/carers and our school community 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 is acknowledged in the classroom, and formally in school assemblies and communications to parents/the school community
- 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 our Student Leaders Representative Group and other forums including Homegroup meetings, peer Support groups and safe space sessions. Students are also encouraged to speak with their teachers, Homegroup Teacher, EAL,L&N Coordinator, Applied Learning Coordinator, Assistant Principal and Principal whenever they have any questions or concerns.
- Create opportunities for cross—age connections amongst students through cocurricular programs and peer support programs.
- All students are welcome to self-refer to a Student Support Team member, the Engagement Coordinator, Wellbeing Coordinator, School Nurse, Class Home Group Teacher, Assistant Principal and Principal 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.
- We engage in school wide positive behaviour support with our staff and students, which includes programs such as respectful relationships for which our school has developed an approach to meet our students needs which is primarily delivery through our Health and Wellbeing program and reinforced in Personal Development Skills units of the core curriculum across the school.
- Programs, incursions and excursions developed to address issue specific needs or behaviour (i.e. anger management programs)
- Opportunities for student inclusion (i.e. student clubs, morning and and lunchtime programs and activities)
- Buddy or peer support
- Measures are in place to empower our school community to identify, report and address inappropriate and harmful behaviours such as racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination or harassment.

Targeted

- Each student has a Homegroup Teacher and each class has assigned Learning Support and Student Support workers. All staff work collaboratively monitor the health and wellbeing of students in our school, and each student should have at least three or more teachers/staff members as a key point of daily connection and contact for students who may need additional support
- All our students have English as a Additional Language (EAL) backgrounds and all are supported in developing their English oracy, literacy and numeracy as a central focus across our whole school. All our students are from cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) refugee backgrounds and central to

our philosophy, values and practices is ensuring all students feel safe, included and a sense of belonging in our school – this is inherent to a rationale for creating the River Nile School.

- We provide a positive and respectful learning environment for our students who identify as LGBTIQ+ and follow our Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Gender Identity Policy.
- All students in Out of Home Care, or part of the Refugee Minor Program, are supported in accordance with the DET policy on [Supporting Students in Out-of-Home Care](#) including having an Individual Learning Plan and Student Care Team (SCT) and being referred to the Assistant Principal - Student Support and School Operations for Educational Needs Assessment(s) and adjustments planning and support.
- Students with a disability are supported to be able to engage fully in their learning and school activities in accordance with RNS and DET policy on [Students with Disability](#), such as through reasonable adjustments to support access to learning programs, consultation with parents/carers/families and student support groups and individual learning plans.
- Wellbeing staff our school nurse and Homegroup Teachers deliver health promotion and education and personal and social skills development in response to needs identified by student wellbeing data, classroom teachers or other school staff each year.
- All staff apply a Trauma-informed Practice (TIP) approach in working with our students many of who have experienced complex trauma.
- As a registered senior secondary school, all students are assisted to develop a Career / Pathway Plan, with targeted goals and support to plan for their future. All students are assisted to plan work experience or workplace learning as part of this.

Individual

RNS 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 for each student and, if needed, 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 youth mental health counselling 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/parent(s)/carer, with any external allied health professionals, services or agencies that are supporting the student
- Monitoring individual student attendance and developing an Attendance Improvement Plans in collaboration with the student and their family/parent(s)/carer.
- 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.

Where appropriate, we encourage reference and align procedures and practices with information on the Department's Policy and Advisory Library such as:

- [Student Support Groups](#)
- [Individual Education Plans](#)

- [Behaviour - Students](#)
- [Behaviour Support Plans](#)
- [Student Support Services](#)

as well as to other DET programs and services such as:

- [Program for Students with Disabilities](#)
- [Mental health toolkit](#)
- [headspace](#)
- [Navigator](#)
- [LOOKOUT](#)

4. Identifying students in need of support

River Nile School is committed to providing the necessary support to ensure our students are supported intellectually, culturally, 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.

River Nile School will utilise the following information and tools to identify students in need of extra emotional, cultural, 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 (and if there ever was any, detention and suspension data)
- 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, inclusive and supportive school environment. We expect that all students, staff, parents/carers and members of our school community to 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, included 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 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. Further information about raising a complaint or concern is available in our Complaints Policy.

6. Behavioural expectations for all students, staff and management

Behavioural expectations of students are grounded in our school's Statement of Values and Student Code of Conduct – available publicly on the schools website at this link

<http://www.rivernileschool.vic.edu.au/policies> and discussed with students at the beginning of each school year and regularly across the school year.

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 this policy. [If your school has a stand-alone bullying prevention policy] Bullying will be managed in accordance with our Bullying Prevention Policy – available publicly on the schools website at this link

<http://www.rivernileschool.vic.edu.au/policies>

When a student acts in breach of the behaviour standards of our school community, River Nile School will institute a staged response, consistent with RNS policies on behaviour, discipline and student wellbeing, inclusion and engagement. Where appropriate, parents/carers will be informed about the inappropriate behaviour and the disciplinary action taken by teachers and other school staff.

Our school considers, explores and implement positive and non-punitive interventions to support student behaviour before considering disciplinary measures such as withdrawal of privileges or withdrawal from class.

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:

- Informing a student that their behaviour is inappropriate
- Teacher controlled consequences such as moving a student in a classroom, moving them to one of the quiet or therapeutic spaces around our school or other reasonable and proportionate responses to misbehaviour – consistent with our Trauma-informed Practice (Healing) approach.
- Withdrawal of privileges
- Referral to their Hometeam Teacher or member of the Student Support Team or School Leadership Team with rapport with the student
- Restorative practices
- Behaviour support and intervention meetings
- Suspension
- Expulsion

Suspension, expulsion and restrictive interventions are measures of last resort and may only be used in situations consistent with DET policy, available at:

- <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/suspensions/policy>
- <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/expulsions/policy>
- <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/restraint-seclusion/policy>

In line with Ministerial Order 1125, no student aged 8 or younger will be expelled without the approval of the Secretary of the Department of Education and Training.

The Principal of River Nile School is responsible for ensuring all suspensions and expulsions are recorded on a case incident report.

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

7. Engaging with families

River Nile School values the input of parents/carers and all members of the school community, 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 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.
- 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 Reviews, Support Care Teams, and the development of individual learning plans for students, as appropriate.

8. Evaluation

River Nile 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. Sources of data that will be assessed on an annual basis include:

- student survey data
- incidents data
- school reports
- parent feedback
- case management trends

River Nile School will also regularly monitor available data to ensure any wellbeing or engagement issues are acted upon in a timely manner and any intervention or adjustments occur as soon as possible.

COMMUNICATION

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website <http://www.rivernileschool.vic.edu.au/policies>
- Included in staff handbook, reviewed annually and included in staff induction processes
- Included in student handbook
- Made available in hard copy from school business office upon request

Our school will also ensure it follows the mandatory parent/carer notification requirements with respect to suspensions and expulsions outlined in DET policies at:

- [Suspension process](#)
- [Expulsions - Decision](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The following RNS policies are also relevant to this Student Wellbeing, Inclusion and Engagement Policy:

- Child Safety Policy
- Bullying Prevention Policy
- Inclusion and Diversity Policy
- Statement of Values and School Philosophy

The following DET policies are relevant to this Student Engagement, Inclusion and Wellbeing Policy:

- [Attendance](#)
- [Student Engagement](#)
- [Child Safe Standards](#)
- [Supporting Students in Out-of-Home Care](#)
- [Students with Disability](#)
- [LGBTIQ Student Support](#)
- [Behaviour - Students](#)
- [Suspensions](#)
- [Expulsions](#)
- [Restraint and Seclusion](#)

The River Nile School Inc.

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Endorsed Charity & Deductible Gift Recipient

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