

Student Wellbeing and Engagement policy

Waratah Special Developmental School



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact the school office.

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.

At Waratah SDS we believe that student engagement and wellbeing is the foundation for student learning and is therefore a school wide priority. The Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy articulates the school community's shared expectations in the areas of student wellbeing and engagement, attendance and behaviour. The policy supports the rights and articulates the expectations of every member of the school community to engage in and promote a safe, inclusive and stimulating learning environment. 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 well-being 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.

CONTENTS

1. School profile
2. School values, philosophy and vision
3. Wellbeing and engagement strategies
4. Identifying students in need of support
5. Student rights and responsibilities
6. Student behavioural expectations and management
7. Engaging with families
8. Evaluation

POLICY

1. School profile

Waratah Special Developmental School caters for approximately 75 students who have a moderate to severe intellectual disability aged from 5 to 18 years. More than 50% of these students have an additional diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder; a number also have physical and sensory impairments. All students have communication difficulties, and many are non-verbal. The students have delayed social skill development and have difficulty interacting appropriately with peers, staff and people in the community. Students have little understanding of potential dangers and are vulnerable to abuse.

The school SFOE is 0.55. **Approximately 50% of students come from a family where another language is spoken at home, and over 10% identify as indigenous. Students come from a wide area including Richmond, Collingwood, Northcote, Fairfield, Carlton, Fitzroy, West Heidelberg, Ivanhoe, and parts of Rosanna. With such a diverse student base, the school attempts at all times to maintain its commitment to cultural safety for all of its students.**

2. School values, philosophy and vision

Waratah SDS's Statement of Values and School Philosophy is integral to the work that we do and is the foundation of our school community. Students, staff and members of our school community are encouraged to live and demonstrate our core values of Care, Respect, Responsibility and Safety at every opportunity.

Our school's vision is 'Independence for Every Student, Every Day, Everywhere'. Our mission is to build the capacity of every student to be independent and to develop social skills and readiness for post school life.

Our Statement of Values and Philosophy is available on the school website.

3. Wellbeing and engagement strategies

Waratah SDS 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.

The school aims to create a **motivating and supportive environment** that enables students to experience success, develop greater independence and participate in the community. We believe that the best educational outcomes are achieved through a strong **school and home partnership**. Our school provides a secure learning environment in which challenging, stimulating and structured programs ensure that all students achieve success. We aim for all students to become as independent as possible and to achieve their best by participating in a broad range of activities within both the school and community settings. We recognize and value the individuality of our students.

All students at Waratah SDS have an **Individual Learning Plan (ILP)**. The ILP is developed during the year with teachers, parents/caregivers, therapists and other relevant professionals contributing. The ILP forms the basis for the students' programs for the year and reflects individual student's abilities

and progress towards increased independence. A functional and integrated approach is taken to student learning with priority goals being addressed in a variety of activities throughout the day.

Many **stimulating and motivating programs** are provided to encourage student engagement including a kitchen garden program, homecrafts, music, sensory art, riding for the disabled, dance, swimming and school camps. Throughout the school there is a strong emphasis on using structured teaching, visual materials, repetition and teaching skills in a variety of situations to encourage generalisation.

The **therapy programs** are an integral part of the school curriculum and are offered on a needs basis. The therapy team includes speech pathology, occupational therapy and physiotherapy. The therapists work closely with teaching staff and provide valuable input into individual education plans. They work throughout the school demonstrating and discussing with teaching and support staff how the therapy components can be incorporated into classroom programs.

Developing **language/communication skills** is a key focus throughout the school. As students develop their ability to communicate, they gain greater independence and control in their life. Often, negative behaviour is a consequence of communication frustration and by implementing simple communication strategies many behavioural issues can be significantly reduced. Alongside speech we use a range of augmentative communication systems which include signing, picture symbols, photographs and voice output devices. Augmentative Communication systems are used extensively throughout the school. Opportunities for communication are incorporated into all aspects of the school day.

The use of **digital technologies** to engage students in learning and as a communication tool has been a key focus throughout the school. Whilst this is an exciting development, we are aware of the issues around cyber bullying and the need to teach the students cyber safe practices. ***“Cyber-bullying is when one student is targeted by another through the use of digital technology, mobile communication devices or through the internet.”*** Cyber Savvy <http://www.stride.org.au/cyber-savvy.aspx>. (Refer to Appendix 6: Digital Technology Guidelines).

The school receives funding for a primary welfare officer and employs a social worker two days per week to take on this role. The welfare officer works with staff and families assisting with a range of student and family wellbeing issues. One of the critical roles of the welfare officer is to assist families to develop an awareness of and access to a range of support services such as respite, recreation programs, medical services and financial supports. The school has access to a number of additional support staff through the Banyule Network. These support staff include psychologists and visiting teachers. This service is on a referral basis.

The school takes a holistic approach to student engagement and wellbeing. As many of our students are also involved with other professional and support agencies the school endeavours to work in partnership with these agencies/professionals. This may include respite and/or recreational services, holiday programs, therapist and doctors.

Developing **appropriate behaviour and social skills** is also a priority in the school and we have two key programs in this area. The **Respectful Relationships** program teaches rules for social safety and students learn what behaviours are appropriate and not appropriate, with different groups of people and in different situations.

The **School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS)** program includes a continuum of behavior support that considers all students and emphasizes prevention. It is a proactive approach and focuses on teaching all students agreed expected behaviours and pro-social skills rather than just reacting to inappropriate behaviour. In addition, a small number of students will require highly

individualized and intensive interventions. These interventions focus on providing supports that are (a) function-based, (b) person-centered, (c) utilise strengths and teach the students skills, (d) continuously evaluated and enhanced, and (e) linked to the school-wide PBS approach.

Measures are also 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.

Transition processes and practices are carefully planned from one year to the next to minimise anxiety, increase resilience and ensure that students develop a readiness to enter their new environment, and make successful transitions.

The school provides a range of opportunities to **enhance parents' knowledge and skills**. This includes individual discussions between parents and school staff about specific strategies, parent sessions about specific programs and approaches run by school staff and outside speakers about specific topics.

Further information on specific strategies used by Waratah, can be found in the links below. These are provided by Department's Policy and Advisory Library:

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

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

- [Students with Disability](#)
- [Mental health toolkit](#)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Navigators](#)
- [LOOKOUT](#)

4. Identifying students in need of support

Waratah SDS 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 to help identify students in need of support and enhance student wellbeing. Waratah SDS 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
- engagement with families
- referrals

- Our MTSS Tier 2 fortnightly meetings involve all full time staff and in section teams, they collect and analyse individual data to develop strategies to support our students in need of further support.
- Our MTSS Tier 3 fortnightly meetings involve the Leadership Team, Wellbeing Team and Therapists, who analyse whole school and individual data to identify students in need and, as a result, provide with relevant supports.

5. Student rights and responsibilities

The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006) outlines a vision of human rights for all Victorians. The charter affirms that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. While the charter demands equality for all, it also emphasises the value of difference. The charter requires public authorities, including government schools and their employees to act compatibly with human rights and to consider them when making decisions and delivering services.

The following legislation needs to be considered when determining rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community:

1. *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
2. *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
3. *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
4. *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*
5. *Education Act 1958*
6. ***Child Safe Standards, 2016.***

At Waratah SDS we believe that:

- Every member of the school community has the right to fully participate in an educational environment that is safe, supportive and inclusive. **As such, the school has a zero tolerance approach to child abuse (see “Child safety Policy”)**
- All students can learn and they have the right to an educational program appropriate to their needs.
- The best educational outcomes are achieved through an effective home school partnership.
- Everyone has the right to be treated with respect and dignity.

The school staff identified five values which underpin the way they work at Waratah SDS.

These values are:

1. Dignity – promoting independence and quality of life
2. Respect – always listening to and respecting others
3. Innovation and Excellence –striving for best practice in special education.
4. Teamwork – working cooperatively towards shared goals
5. Care –to ensure that all members of the school community feel safe in the school environment.

The way in which staff demonstrate these values in their work and interactions with students, parents and colleagues is detailed in Appendix 1.

6. Shared Behavioural expectations and management & 7. Engaging with families

At Waratah SDS we believe that student wellbeing is everyone’s responsibility and that social and emotional wellbeing underpin effective student learning and positive behaviour. The school recognises and responds to the diverse needs of the students, accommodating different learning styles and rates of learning and intervening early to identify and respond to individual student needs.

Waratah SDS has developed shared expectations to ensure that the learning, safety and rights of all are respected. The expectations are intended to be positive in that they set out what is expected and appropriate behaviour 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. Waratah SDS will provide ongoing information sessions for parents on Positive Behaviour Support and the safe use of digital technologies.

School staff

Engagement

The staff will:

- develop flexible pedagogical styles to engage different learners
- deliver curriculum and assessment that challenges and extends students learning
- develop positive relationships with students that promote engagement, wellbeing and learning
- have a strong focus on student voice and student interests.

Attendance

In compliance with Departmental procedures school staff will:

- promote regular attendance with all members of the school community and
- monitor and follow up on absences.

Behaviour

Waratah SDS will support and promote positive behaviours by developing and implementing shared behavioural expectations with the school community through a staged response.

The school leadership team will;

- lead and promote preventative approaches to behavioural issues
- monitor the profile of behaviour issues at the school and the effectiveness of implemented strategies
- provide professional development for staff to build their capacity to promote positive behaviours.

The staff will;

- actively teach expected behaviours
- teach students social competencies through curriculum content and pedagogical approach
- employ behaviour support strategies that reflect the behaviours expected from students
- build a collegiate atmosphere with other school staff to share strategies and support each other to reflect on their implementation of PBS strategies
- actively teach cyber safe practices.

Parents/carers

Engagement

Parents/carers are expected to:

- actively support their child's learning by participating in the goal setting, program planning and review processes and follow through with particular strategies/programs in the home environment where appropriate
- share relevant information about their child to enable the school to develop appropriate individual learning plans
- actively participate in supporting their child's learning by building a positive relationship with the school
- work with the school through attendance at parent-teacher meetings and responding to communications in a timely manner.

Attendance

Parents/carers are expected to:

- ensure that enrolment details for their children are correct
- ensure that their child/children attend school regularly
- supervise their child when using digital technologies and promote safe use. Parents are expected to sign a safe use agreement form when students are borrowing school devices.
(Refer to Appendix 7: School Devices Acceptable Use Agreement)

Behaviour

Parents/carers should understand the school's behavioural expectations and aim to provide a consistent approach that supports their child's learning and engagement in and out of school.

Students

The primary prevention aspect of Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) consists of rules, routines, and physical arrangements that are developed and taught by school staff to encourage appropriate behaviour. The school community developed 3 simple rules, or behavioural expectations, for the school:

1. Act responsibly
2. Act safely
3. Show respect

Visuals were created to represent each of the behaviours (appendix 2).

The school has defined in specific behavioural terms how students would demonstrate the expected behaviours in each area of the school. An expected behaviours matrix is included as Appendix 3.

Staff have worked together to develop strategies to teach and reward the appropriate behaviours. Teaching strategies include specific lessons and resources as well as incidental learning when the opportunity arrives.

School Actions and Consequences

Attendance

The following are ways in which we promote school attendance;

- All student absences/lateness are recorded twice a day (morning and afternoon) by teachers, are aggregated on to our CASES database and communicated to DET.
- The school recognises illness as a reasonable ground for an absence.
- Clear written/verbal statements are made regularly to parents/carers/students about school and community attendance expectations.
- If within three days of the initial absence parents/carers have not provided an explanation contact will be made by the classroom teacher or nominated representative.
- The Welfare Officer or the Principal will contact parents of students with high levels of unexplained or unapproved absences/lateness, with the view to developing and implementing strategies to minimise absences.
- DET and enrolment auditors will be given complete access to all student attendance records if requested.

Behaviour

Through the SWPBS Framework expected behaviours are actively taught and rewarded. Each class has developed acknowledgement and reward systems. These systems vary depending on the students in the group and include praise and tangible rewards given immediately as well as token systems in which students work towards desirable rewards.

Whole school reward systems have also been developed which include:

- Students of the week in the newsletter
- Passenger of the week for each bus
- PBS assembly and certificate presentation once a term.

In developing a system of responses for inappropriate behaviour we considered both the purpose and the impact of the behaviour and have developed a hierarchy of supports, a flow chart and guidelines for responding to inappropriate behaviour (Appendix 4).

For students with frequent and more challenging behaviours a functional behaviour analysis is undertaken, and an individual support plan developed. The functional behavioural analysis includes all those involved with the student (teachers, parents, therapists, service providers, psychologist etc) and seeks to identify the background factors, triggers and consequences of the behaviour of concern. The group analyses these to determine the functions of the behaviour as well as an alternative behaviour that would achieve the same outcome but in an appropriate manner. A support plan is then developed which incorporates strategies to minimise the likelihood of the inappropriate behaviour occurring as well as teach and reinforce the replacement behaviour. The goal is to render the behaviour of concern inefficient, ineffective and irrelevant.

Suspension, expulsion and restrictive interventions are measures of last resort and may only be used in situations consistent with Department 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 Waratah SDS is responsible for ensuring all suspensions and expulsions are recorded on CASES21.

Corporal punishment is prohibited in all schools throughout Victoria. Under no circumstances will staff at Waratah Special Developmental School use corporal punishment at any time

Exclusion

There are specific guidelines regarding the use of suspension and expulsion and these are included as Appendix 5.

8. Evaluation

Waratah SDS 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 survey
- case management
- CASES21, including attendance and absence data.

Waratah SDS will also regularly monitor available data dashboards to ensure any wellbeing or engagement issues are acted upon in a timely manner and any intervention occurs 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
- Included in staff induction processes
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Included as annual reference in school newsletter
- Made available in hard copy from school administration upon request.

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

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

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The following Department of Education and Training policies are relevant to this Student Engagement 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 following school policies are also relevant to this Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy:

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

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	April 2026
Consultation	School Council April 2026, via Xuno and newsletter Term 2 2026
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	April 2028

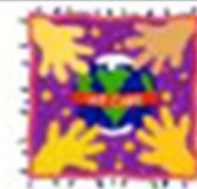
Appendix 1: Waratah SDS Values



Appendix 2: School-wide Expected Behaviours

WARATAH
SPECIAL
DEVELOPMENTAL
SCHOOL

At school we:



Listen to teachers



Ask for help



Care for each other

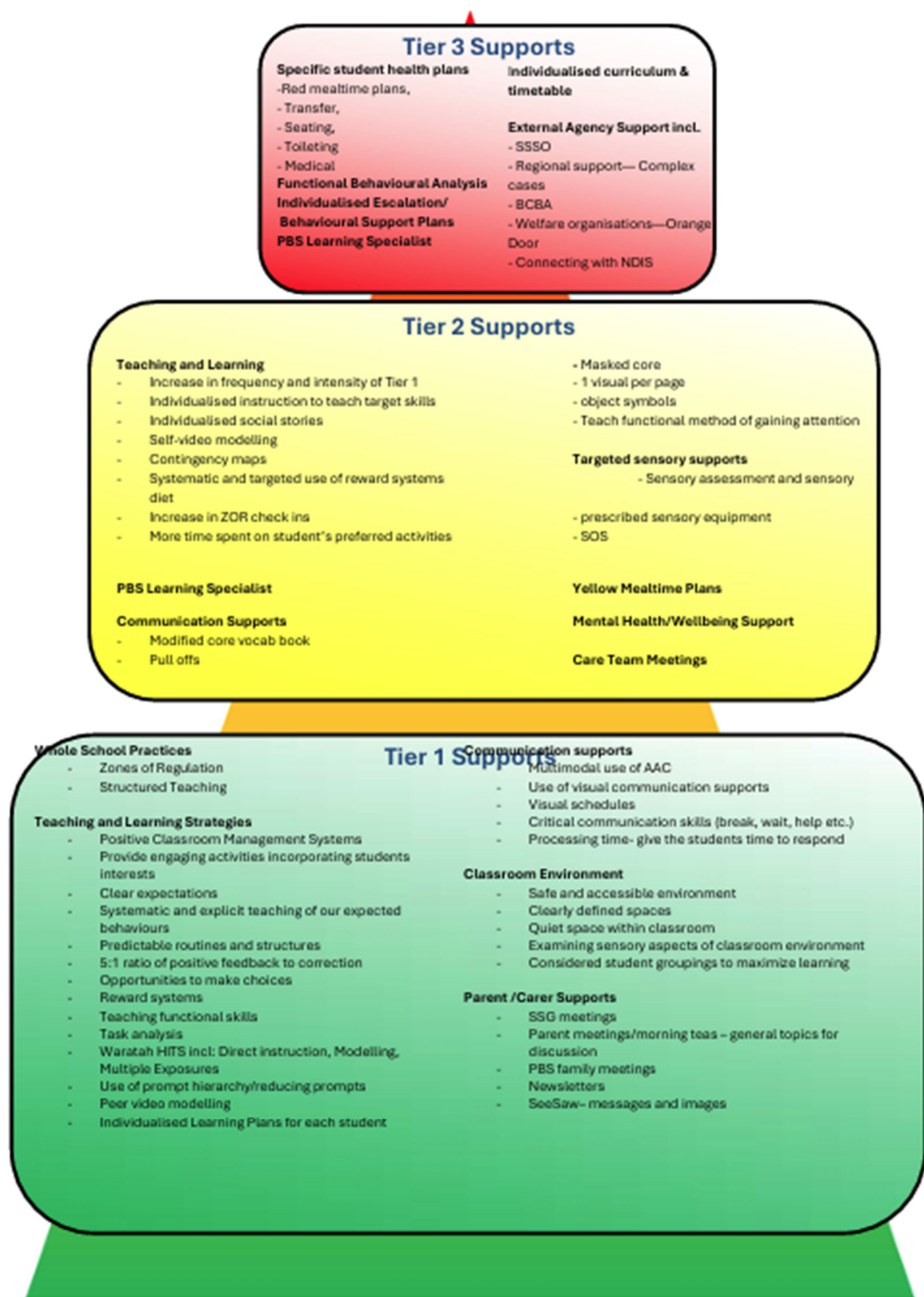


Try our best

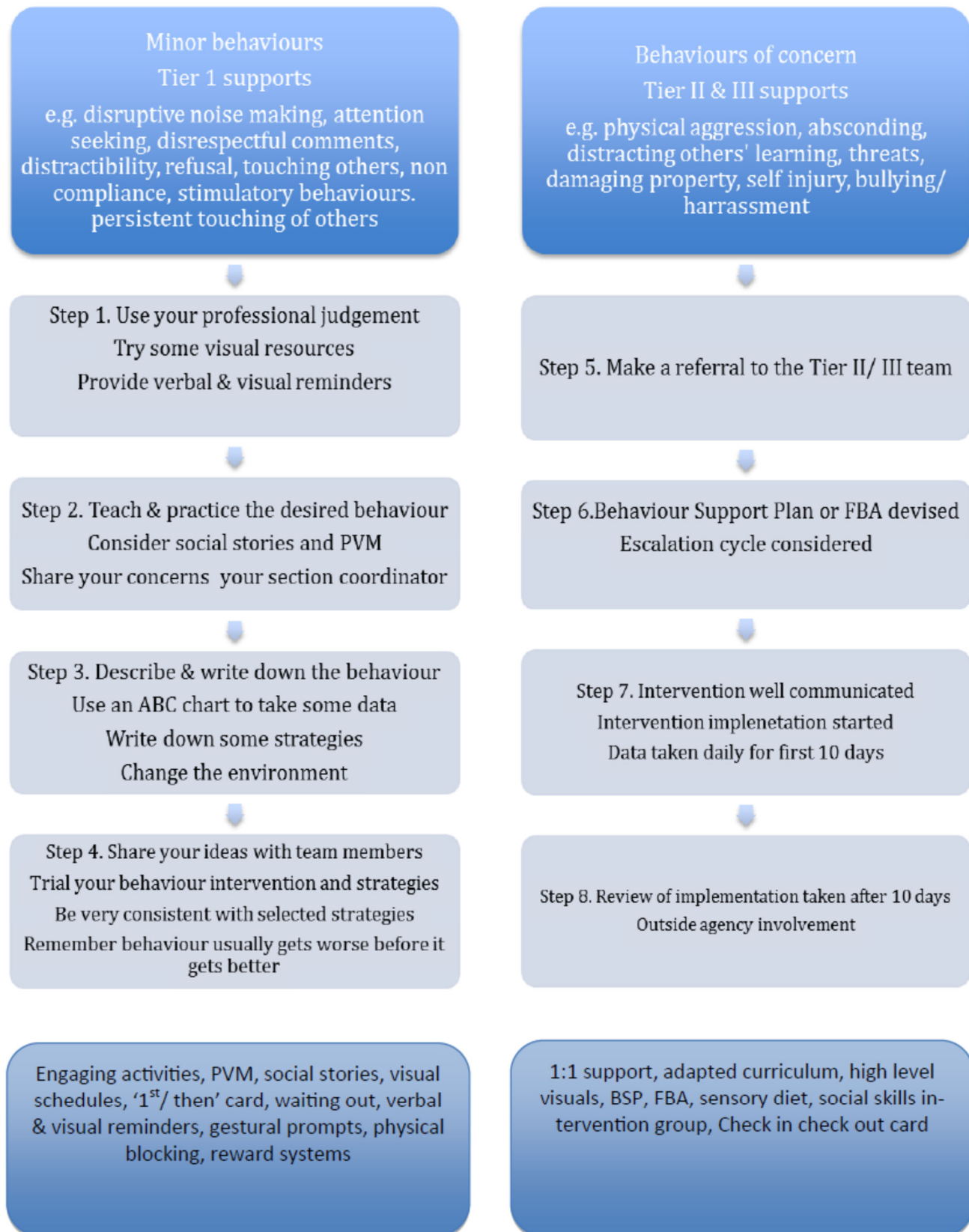
Appendix 3: Matrix of Expected Behaviours

	Always	Classroom	Playground	Bus Time	Community Access	Transitions
	Listen to the teacher	•Look after my things. •Put my belongings away •Toileting •Pack away equipment when finished •Ask for help PMP room •Take off shoes •Follow schedule •Wait your turn •Respect equipment •Be aware of other students	•Use equipment appropriately •Return to class at end of play •Follow teacher instructions •Pack away equipment. •Follow sun smart policy	•Listen for my name and bus number to be called •Look after belongings •Help friends to walk to bus •Wait for assistance if required	•Follow so safe rules •Listen to teachers •Use visuals to communicate with people in the community •Plan and bring what you need with you •Interact appropriately with community members i.e. PECS to make requests, speaking	•Follow teacher instructions •Look after my belongings e.g. PECS book •Help friends walk to specialists classes •Follow the leader •Wait quietly outside specialists classes
	Care for each other Ask for help	•Walk in classroom •Hands and feet to self •Use equipment appropriately •Managing emotions	•Watch out for others •Use equipment appropriately •Go down slide •Wear shoes •One on trampoline at a time •Wear a helmet on bikes. •Follow the rules	•Sit and wait in the classroom •Walk to the bus and classroom •Stay in bus seat with seatbelt on	•Stay with group. •Follow rules. •Road safety rules •Assist friends. •Follow SoSafe rules •Hands and feet to yourself •Stay in your seat when traveling	•Stay with my group •Sit and wait until we are ready to leave •Walk safely
	Try our best	•Waiting and turn taking •Greetings •Cooperation during structured playtime •Listening to and following instructions •Share equipment/objects	•Take turns •Wait •Hands and feet down •Ask for help •Talk nicely •Stay in playground area	•Wait quietly •Help friends to walk and wait •Listen to teachers and supervisors •Greet others	•Use my manners •Wait for a turn •Quiet voice •Have a clean face and appearance	•Listen to teachers •Greet others/specialist teachers

Appendix 4: Continuum of supports and Behaviour flow chart



Waratah SDS Behaviour Flow Chart



Guidelines for Responding to Inappropriate Behaviour

When responding to inappropriate behaviour our aim is to have the student reengaged in learning as quickly as possible and behaving in a socially appropriate manner.

Your response will depend on the purpose or function of the behaviour and the severity of the behaviour

- Your response should not reinforce the behaviour
- Your response should not escalate the behaviour
- Remember to model and teach the alternate behaviour rather than imposing a punishment

If a student becomes aggressive and students or staff are at risk of injury:

- If possible, summon assistance from other staff using the internal intercom by pressing 55* and stating "Code Green (room number)"
- Exit the area or room with the other students and staff so that the harm to others is minimised
- Continue to monitor and observe the dysregulated student

The safety and wellbeing of staff and students is of the utmost importance and take precedence over damage to property.

Initial responses may include:

- Correction and reminder of expected behaviour
- Prompt use of self-management strategies including accessing Zones Toolbox
- Use of behaviour script or social story
- Use a visual schedule OR First... Then...
- Redirect to another activity

If behaviour continues, consider:

- Changing seating
- Changing environmental setting or activity
- Seeking assistance

Suspension and Expulsion Guidelines and Procedures for Victorian Government Schools

The purpose of DET **Suspensions** policy is to ensure all Victorian government schools comply with legislative and Departmental policy requirements when implementing suspension procedures, and can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/suspensions/policy>

The purpose of DET **Expulsions** policy is to ensure that all Victorian government schools comply with legislative and Department policy requirements when implementing student expulsion procedures. The policy can be accessed via the link below:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/expulsions/policy>

The guidelines and procedures for **Suspensions** can be found at the following link and contains the following chapters:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/suspensions/guidance>

- Overview
- Suspension considerations
- Suspension process
- Identifying a support person (relevant person)
- Appoint a relevant person

The guidelines for **Expulsions** can be found at the link below and contains the following chapters:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/expulsions/guidance>

- Overview
- Interventions and supports
- Reflect and investigate
- Behaviour Support and Intervention Meeting
- Decision
- Supported transition
- Appeals



Digital Technology Guidelines

Purpose

At Waratah SDS we believe that student engagement and wellbeing is the foundation for student learning and is therefore a school wide priority. The digital technology guidelines aim to encourage cyber safe behaviour and practices across the school to provide an engaging and safe learning environment.

General Guidelines

- Staff must supervise students when accessing the internet to ensure appropriate use.
- If staff are logged onto a computer in the classroom where students can also access the same computer, staff need to be make sure they log off at all times.
- When staff are saving documents/resources on the network they must respect others privacy and make sure these are save in a secure place that students cannot access.
- Log on details and passwords are not be given out to others or left visible near computers
- If students are accessing the school network or the internet they must be logged on under the student login and password. The student login does not allow access to staff folders and resources.
- Staff are to report incidences of inappropriate use of digital technologies and cyber bullying using the schools standard incident reporting process

Guidelines for use of Portable devices (iPads, cameras, mobile phones, ipods, other...)

- Students are to be seated when using the iPads
- Staff supervision required at all times to ensure appropriate use of device
- Store school devices or student personal devices in locked store room over night or locked cupboard during school hours
- Staff can take devices home, however, need to sign the borrowing book so that we are covered under insurance
- Before students can borrow school devices, parents must sign an acceptable use agreement form.

Guidelines for use of Photos

- Staff need to monitor students use of cameras and other devices to ensure that photos taken are stored and used in an appropriate manner.
- Staff need to be aware of the students that have restrictions on the use of photos for publicity purposes and ensure that this is adhered to.



School Devices Acceptable Use Agreement

Students and parents are responsible for the care and cyber safe use of any school devices/digital technologies (iPad, camera, ipods etc.) whilst it is at home, and must ensure that the following points are adhered to at all times.

- Devices are for the sole use of the student at Waratah Special Developmental School
- Devices must be fully charged each night if applicable ready for the next day
- Devices must be stored safely in a locked cupboard or the students school bag
- The student must bring the device to school every day
- The student must be supervised when using any device and/or accessing the internet
- The student is following the school wide PBS expected behavior: Act Respectfully, Act Safely and Show Respect.
(Refer to Attached Cyber Safe Expected Behaviours information)

Failure to adhere to this agreement will result in students no longer being able to take any school devices home. You may be responsible for any damage or loss which occurs as a result of negligence or failure to adhere to this agreement.

Students Name: _____

Students Class: _____

School Device: _____

Student Signature: (If applicable) _____ Date: ____/____/____

Parents Name: _____

I understand the terms of this agreement, and agree to be bound by them whilst my student has access to any school device at home. I have retained a copy of this agreement for my records.

Parents Signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Principal /Teacher Signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____