What is the role of school policy?

- School staff must make sense of theory and research on bullying while operating within the legal framework, jurisdictional requirements, standards for best practice in learning and teaching, and the complexities of children's and young people's personal and social development.

- Limited research is available on the effectiveness of schools' anti-bullying policies.

- Each school is a unique, diverse and dynamic social community, with particular characteristics which need to be reflected in local school policy.

- The school's anti-bullying policy is the vehicle to articulate the school community's shared understanding of bullying and how best to respond, and the agreed preventative and responsive strategies implemented by the school on the basis of this understanding.

- The actual process of developing a school policy is an exercise in exploring, developing and articulating the school community's values and beliefs about students and about bullying.

- Guidelines for good practice in policy development and implementation are provided for Australian schools in the *National Safe Schools Framework* (NSSF). The NSSF is based on extensive expert consultation.

- Research reinforces the importance of school policy being relevant to students. Understanding how children and young people make sense of bullying within their peer social cultures provides a basis for developing relevant anti-bullying policies and approaches.

- Policy can fail to make any practical difference unless it is relevant, representative, well developed and used as a 'living' document.

- The involvement of students as well as parents and carers in development and implementation helps to create a policy document for all members of the school community.

Implications for schools

- There is no 'one size fits all' policy recommended for addressing bullying in schools, but the NSSF and jurisdiction-specific frameworks provide guidelines for school policy development.

- Schools can use policy development and implementation as a way to involve everyone in the school, and to take a systemic whole-school approach to preventing and responding to aggression, including bullying, on all levels within the school.

- School policy related to countering bullying needs to be relevant to students; involving students in policy development helps to create a 'living' document.

- Including statements in policy about the schools' values, perspective and approach to countering bullying helps to reduce fragmented approaches or reliance on unproven fad programs.

- Given the social role of bullying based on the key motivation of enhancing social status, schools' policies and practices must encompass social hierarchy and competition in schools.

- School policy focuses on creating positive, safe and supportive learning environments, rather than issues. A school's anti-bullying policy may appropriately be incorporated within other school policies, such as the student wellbeing or positive student behaviour policy. However, the policy that relates to how the school responds to bullying should be clearly identified for the whole-school community.

- Schools need to promote their anti-bullying policies and communicate to the school community.

Policy guidelines from the *National Safe Schools Framework* (NSSF)

Element 3 of the NSSF provides guidance to schools on the development of policy and procedures.

Element 3: *Whole school, collaboratively developed policies, plans and structures for supporting safety and wellbeing. Examples of actions/practices include:*

- *The school's policies on safety and wellbeing have been drafted, refined and reviewed in* **collaboration** *with teachers, parents, carers and students.*

- *The policies include* **clear plain language** *definitions of terms including student wellbeing, aggression, violence, bullying, cyberbullying, cyber harassment and acceptable use of technology.*

- *The policies should include information about:*
  - *the school's **expectations about students' positive behaviour** towards others in the school, including when outside school hours and off school grounds*
  - *all school community members' **rights to and responsibilities for safety and wellbeing***
  - *the **school's role in managing** any behaviours that occur that are not consistent with school policy*
  - ***procedures for dealing with critical incidents** that impact on the effective operation of the school or create a danger or risk to individuals at the school or on school related activities (i.e. a critical incident management policy).*

- *School policies on safety and wellbeing are **communicated to all members** of the school community at regular intervals (e.g. through assemblies, house meetings, school website, diaries).*

- ***Students have an opportunity to voice issues and concerns** on emerging safety and wellbeing policies (e.g. use of mobile phones, acceptable use of technology and uniforms).*

- *Staff implementation of safety and wellbeing policies is **fair and consistent**.*

- ***School regularly audits** its obligation to mandatory legislation and jurisdiction policies on safety and wellbeing at regular intervals.*

- *The school maintains **easily accessible and current comprehensive information** on aspects of safety and wellbeing (e.g. road safety, water safety, first aid, sexual safety, drugs and alcohol and OHS).*

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BULLYING. NO WAY!