



PASTORAL CARE

(Support for Special Needs)

1. RATIONALE

Perhaps the single most important reason for a child being enrolled at The Joseph Varga School (JVS) concerns the care the school staff has about the welfare of each child at the school.

This genuine care includes the rights of the child to be welcome in the environment as an individual and involves assisting each child to become a contented, caring, whole human being capable of fulfilling potential so as to function successfully in society.

In order for this to happen, JVS is an accepting and loving and non-judging environment in which students can trust and feel safe.

This particular objective not only underpins the school's pupil welfare policies, but also the school's total Academic, Emotional, Behavioral and Transitional curriculum.

It is also part of the school's pastoral responsibility to try to accommodate each child's home and school profiles, issues and problems.

The school believes that to a large extent such problems can be solved by teachers having a caring, sensitive and supporting attitude, which also underlies the school's pastoral services.

Help always tries to be positive and constructive, with moves made to eradicate any form of prejudice or discrimination by any child upon another.

All children are constantly made to feel wanted, and members of "one big, happy family".

2. THE SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICY & PHILOSOPHY

The special education philosophy of the school:

CONSIDERS that every child is "special".

ENHANCES each child's perceptions of him/herself as a person and as a learner in all areas of the curriculum.

ENABLES each child to grow as a person and as a learner in all areas of the curriculum.

DEVELOPS each child's respect for individual differences.

ENCOURAGES each child to care about the wellbeing of his/her peers.

FOSTERS a sense of loyalty amongst students and staff about the spirit of co-operation and individuality respected in the school.

ASSEMBLES detailed reports, assessments and histories from various agencies and specialists about each child so that they can be used to facilitate diagnosis and learning.

INVITES professionals (e.g. psychologists, speech therapists) to work with individuals at the school.

COLLABORATES regularly with all those specialists working with an individual in order to maintain an active support network for the child.

REQUIRES caregivers, in extremely special situations, to act as the child's aide during the school day.

AVOIDS the use of labels to classify children's problems, as they can be misleading or self-fulfilling prophecies.

OBTAINS a deeper and broader understanding of the specific behaviors of each child, how each child works as an individual, and how each child views him/herself.

CO-ORDINATES AND MONITORS the contributions of the network available to the child.

PINPOINTS the nature, degree and severity of developmental disability, emotional disturbance and/or conduct disorder, thereby helping to develop optimum learning environments and methodologies, which engender each child's growth and confidence.

IDENTIFIES patterns in and across each child's social, behavioral, emotional, and academic performance.

USES each child's pattern of scattered skill levels in different skill areas of the curriculum to help devise and promote appropriate individualized patterns of learning.

ENSURES the nature of the placement of the child in the teaching program is flexible and sensitive to changes in each child's behavioral, social, emotional and academic development.

PROVIDES specialist services, which are designed to meet the needs of all children in the school.

DEVELOPS a specialist intensive intervention program that will accommodate changes in both the child and the environment.

PROVIDES each child with the necessary, intensive, one-to-one emotional and behavioural support to help reach his/her fullest potential.

DESIGNS AND IMPLEMENTS an Individual Educational Program for each child.

EXAMINES a child's responses to various learning situations, and notes differences between group and one-to-one contexts.

OFFERS "special" facilities to make provision for:

- children with significant disabilities that require support on a long-term basis; and/or
- children who require intensive intervention on a short-term basis (due e.g. to a temporary shutdown to learning) so that they may be reintegrated into other classes in the school.

ENSURES that each child learns to recognize his/her own special strengths, talents and builds on them to fulfill his/her own potential as a whole person.

3. PROCEDURE:

3.1 The process for identifying the pastoral care needs of students begins at enrolment with a series of interviews and processes to establish the nature and extent of a student's needs.

It continues in collaboration with parents and specialists to formulate the child's Individual Education Plan, to ensure the child's needs continue to be met.

This process involves the implementation of strategies and outcomes to be worked on in both the home environment and the school context.

3.2 This process can involve the child being relocated into a different classroom, the involvement of different therapists, the use of different emotional and behavioural strategies, that is, as part of the child's growing emotional tool kit.

3.3 The Joseph Varga school caters solely for students with high special needs. As such, the school employs specialist services and staff to support and cater for the specific needs of these students including their academic, emotional/behavioural, and transitional/life skill needs as part of their personal growth and development.

3.4 With regards to case management, JVS plays a key role in coordinating and monitoring the input of several specialist services with a view to:

- * replacing inappropriate patterns of communicating and acting with more appropriate ones,

- * generating positive outcomes for the child at risk, and

- * resolving issues of family breakdown, on a sustainable basis, so that the 'gains' do not quickly wash out.

4. SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

4.1 The school's new Psychologist also serves as the school's Behavioural Specialist, who can, for instance, initiate the need for an individual to have personal, group or family counseling within the school, after consultation with other relevant staff in the school.

4.2 Students themselves can also independently request formal and informal counseling from any personnel, as the need arises.

4.3 Such counseling, which usually takes the form of an informal chat, can be scheduled to take place during class time or after school, as the counselor sees fit.

4.4 Sessions last no longer than 30 minutes.

4.5 Class teachers administer some other pastoral care, as a natural part of their 'duty of care'.

4.6 Further opportunities are also created for meaningful, purposeful dialogue during psychological testing (with in-house and external specialists), which can again be initiated by student or staff.

4.7 Pastoral Care is administered too on what appears to be an informal or ad hoc basis, at the point of need, in the Real Therapeutic day-to-day events of the school.

4.8 In these challenging and meaningful contexts, that can occur anywhere, anytime in the school day, or on camps, excursions, sport, outings, trained staff can intervene by questioning, redirecting, refocusing or modeling appropriate student behaviours.

4.9 It is the policy and procedure of The Joseph Varga School that these informal situations create the optimum contexts in which to naturally challenge students, whilst providing the means for students to 'catch' and practice more appropriate ways of acting and comprehending, than via more formal counseling.

4.10 In many senses, such teaching-learning opportunities express the psycho-educational spirit of the school!

5. SPECIAL NEEDS

5.1 With respect to 'the identification and provision of support for students with special needs', referrals for more intensive intervention can come in-house to the Principal from classroom teachers.

5.2 External specialists (such as psychiatrist, speech, occupational therapist) also refer.

5.3 A team of experts will consider the best way in which to better cater for the student's needs by scheduling additional individualized intervention, and enlisting the support of the necessary staff in order to deliver this instruction or assistance.

5.4 Such planning and decision-making frequently occurs as a normal part of formulating an Individual Education Program for each child enrolled in the school, in consultation with family, and may include other relevant medical practitioners and/or psychologists.

6. PERSONNEL

6.1 The school has appointed a School Psychologist, who is also a Clinical Psychologist, who will be responsible too for Pastoral Care Services, along with Counseling, Risk Management, Work Experience, Outreach, among other duties.

The Principal can nevertheless still take advice from the school's External Clinical Psychologist, among other specialists.

6.2 The external clinical psychologist also works in conjunction with the Principal on the psychological profiling of individual students.

6.3 As the need arises, the school can co-opt the services of specialized therapists in such areas as adolescent help, anger control, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social skills.

6.4 The school works closely with other government services such as Community Services, Health, Juvenile Justice etc, in relation to providing a coherent and cohesive social welfare program for the individual child.

6.5 Present teachers comprise of between 2 – 9 years each of special needs teaching experience.

6.6 Teachers are trained in classroom-based therapeutic approaches to catering for the emotional/behavioural and life skill needs of students as part of the school's ongoing professional development program.

This also includes intensive inservices, external courses, and more recently, the need for all classroom teaching staff to acquire further qualifications in special education.

7. SCHOOL-APPROVED EXTERNAL PROVIDERS & OUTSIDE TUTORS

7.1 The Joseph Varga School engages the service of external providers (e.g. Sydney Secondary Distance Education School & TAFE) when it comes to offering its students specific academic courses that are more 'Regular' in nature.

In reaching 'Agreements' with External Service Providers, the school undertakes to provide emotional and behavioural support as part of full-time supervision.

This entails the provision of all pastoral care functions identified in sections **1** to **6** above.

7.2 It is in fact the provision of these services that enables the students to successfully progress through the courses offered by the external providers.

7.3 The pupil welfare program enables the personal and social development of individuals to such an extent that the students clearly demonstrate their capacity to undertake independent work and apply the principles of self-discipline, self-regulation, self-control primarily due to an enhancement of their own self-esteem.

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