Management of Weapons in Schools Guideline

SCOPE

“All Australian schools are safe, supportive and respectful learning and teaching communities that promote student wellbeing” NSSF (revised 2011)

A safe and supportive school is described in the following way:

“In a safe and supportive school, the risk for all types of harm is minimized, diversity is valued and all members of the school community feel respected and included and can be confident that they will receive support in the face of any threats to their safety and wellbeing”. (NSSF)

Brisbane Catholic Education promotes and aims to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all students. We strive to ensure a culture where all acknowledge and understand that student safety and wellbeing is the responsibility of everybody.

GUIDELINE

This Guideline should be read in conjunction with the:

- Brisbane Catholic Education Student Behaviour Support Policy, Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines
- BCE Student Protection Policy and Processes
- Guideline for Managing Police Investigations in Schools
- Guideline for Managing Drug Related Incidents in Catholic Schools
- Critical Incident Response Policy and Procedures
- Media Crisis Communication Guidelines
- OHS Incident Reporting and Investigation.

Brisbane Catholic Education does not condone any behaviour that puts the safety of any student, staff member or community member at risk.

The aim of this guideline is to:

- assist schools to develop and implement fair and just intervention plans for knife and other weapon related incidents
- support students, parents and school personnel in the process of coping with knife and other weapon related incidents
- support existing policies and initiate programs that reduce knife and other weapon related incidents in schools.

Weapons

‘A weapon means: any object, device or instrument designed as a weapon or through its use, is capable of threatening or producing bodily harm or which may be used to inflict injury’.

Knives

Knives as a weapon category have been involved in approximately one third of all incidents involving Weapons Act offences in Queensland Educational institutions. The actual level of incidents involving the use of a knife or other weapon in schools is very low (approximately 2%, Prof P. Mazerolle, 2012) Weapons in Schools Report.
A knife is defined in Weapons Act 1990 (s.51(7)) to include: ‘a thing with a sharpened point or blade that is reasonably capable of being held in one (1) or both hands and being used to wound, or threaten to wound, anyone when held in one (1) or both hands’.

Where the school provides students with access to knives (e.g. kitchens, technology and art rooms), the teacher will ensure that they are used and stored under supervision, appropriately and safely. The school has the obligation through the teacher, to ensure that equipment and tools are properly used and stored and that appropriate risk management processes are recorded and adhered to.

Students should not bring knives or other weapons to school. If a student is found in possession of a knife or other weapon, it is important to enquire as to the reason for the possession, where possible. Possession of a knife or other weapon for protection or self-defence is not a reasonable excuse.

PROCEDURES

1. Where there is ‘reasonable suspicion’ that a student is in possession of a knife or other weapon:
   - assess the level of risk to the student and others
   - the matter should be immediately reported to the school administration
   - the principal will identify an administrator who will be responsible for managing the incident
   - the student should be asked to accompany a member of school personnel, to the school office. Once at the office, the administrator, together with a witness, should request that the student hand over the knife or other weapon
   - school personnel should not undertake a personal search, which involves touching the student and should request that the student empty their pockets
   - if the student declines to hand over the item, the student’s parents/caregivers should be contacted and informed of the situation. The parent/caregiver should be given an opportunity to speak with the student on the telephone or to attend the school, to speak with the student. Pending this, the student should remain with the member of school personnel and the witness
   - if after the student’s contact with their parent/guardian, they continue to decline to hand over the item, the police should be called and informed that the school holds a reasonable suspicion that the student possesses a knife or other weapon
   - if the student does not have the item on their person, the student can be requested to open their bags and to cooperate with the search of the student’s property, including their bag/s and locker
   - if the student refuses to make their property available for search, the student’s parents should be contacted and informed of the school’s concerns regarding the property. The parent/guardian may give permission for a search of the student’s property to be conducted
   - if neither the student nor the parent gives permission for the property to be searched, the school should contact the police
   - administrators and teachers should exercise care with confiscated property. It should be labelled and stored carefully and securely in the presence of a witness.

2. Where it is ‘known’ that a student is in possession of a knife or other weapon:
   - assess the level of risk to the student and others. Only when ‘reasonable grounds’ exist for believing, from behaviour or statements, that the student may cause immediate physical harm to others or themselves, can the property of a student be seized or confiscated (bearing in mind the safety of self, staff and others)
   - administrators and teachers should exercise care with confiscated property. It should be labelled and stored carefully and securely in the presence of a witness
   - if the property is to be seized, excessive force should be avoided
   - the police will be contacted if the item in possession, is unlawful
• the parent/caregiver will be contacted, unless there are student protection concerns or other matters are identified, that preclude the parent being contacted at this time
• the student may be suspended and consequently excluded if appropriate
• support should be provided to students involved
• the incident must be reported to the Area Supervisor and recorded in the Student Behaviour Support database or a school database
• the Principal may use discretion in determining, on a case-by-case basis, what appropriate course of action is warranted.

Schools must record any incident where a student brings a knife (as defined in Section 51 of the Weapons Act 1990) or a weapon to school using the appropriate record form and send this record form to BCEO as outlined on the form. Schools are also required to record these incidences in the Student Behaviour Support database or a school data base. This could be completed by uploading the record form into the database.

If harm/likely harm of a student is reasonably suspected a report will be made to the police using the Student Protection Harm Report Form B.

3. Making secure confiscated knives or other weapons
School personnel who find, or are given, a knife or other weapon, should secure the item in a place restricted from general access, such as a school safe or locked filing cabinet.

The knife or other weapon should be labelled with the date, time and location where the item was obtained and names recorded of all school personnel who have had contact with it. A school administrator should confirm the labelling of the knife or other weapon and accept responsibility for its containment prior to handing it over to police or returning it to the student’s parents.

The administrator managing the incident will ensure that a written record of the incident is maintained, including the names of all students, school personnel, parents, police (if involved) and other individuals involved in the incident.

4. Post-incident response by Principals
Following any incident involving knives and other weapons the pastoral care of the students, the whole community and the offending student is paramount. It is important to:
• consider the behaviour of the student, who possessed the knife or other weapon and the consequences of the behaviour, for the student
• consider if the student is a Student with Disability (SWD) and therefore what additional assistance may be required
• consider the personal, emotional, social and wellbeing needs of any student(s), staff and community members involved and how they might best be addressed
• access any support personnel e.g. Area Supervisor, Student Wellbeing, School Guidance Counsellor
• consider reminding staff about the availability of the Employee Assistance Program – Centacare Consulting Services
• contact BCEO Communication and Marketing in response to media requests.

5. Proactive Approaches
Principals should ensure that:
• the school has adapted relevant BCE policies, procedures and guidelines, to suit their individual school community and communicated these to staff
• staff have access to and are cognisant of, risk management strategies within their school and relevant BCE policies, procedures and guidelines
• staff are aware of the BCE and school’s guidelines and procedures, regarding knives and other weapons in schools, through professional learning opportunities, regular reviews and information sharing
• staff are aware of the relevant BCE personnel, to be informed of incidents involving a knife or other weapon and personnel able to assist
• students are aware of the guidelines, procedures and consequences for knives and other weapons in schools through training, newsletters, fact sheets and information briefings
• parents are aware of the guidelines, procedures and consequences relating to knives and other weapons in schools through newsletters, fact sheets websites and other forms of communication.