



OFFENSIVE MATERIALS & THEMES POLICY

College council will review this policy every three years or as directed by DET

Date approved: October 2016

Date of next review: 2019

RATIONALE

It is Department of Education and Training (DET) policy that students are not to be exposed to offensive or obscene material while in the care of schools. Principals should ensure that:

- the curriculum material and resources used in the school are appropriate for the students' age groups and well-being, including the students' social and moral development; and
- the exploration of issues and ideas related to the curriculum material and resources is relevant to the central purposes of education and is conducted with due respect for the students and their parents.
See: [School Policy and Advisory Guide – Selecting Teaching and learning Resources in School.](#)

DEFINITION

For the purpose of this Policy:

“**Offensive material or theme**” is any material or theme which:

- offensive or obscene material means material about which there is generally a consensus view that it is unacceptable;
- describes, depicts, expresses or otherwise deals with matters of nudity, sexual activity, sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in a manner that a reasonable adult would generally regard as unsuitable for minors of the age of the relevant students;
- describes or depicts a person who is, or looks like, a minor under 16 years engaging in sexual activity or in an indecent sexual manner or context;
- promotes, incites or instructs in matters of crime, violence or unlawful discrimination; or
- uses profane, indecent or obscene language contrary to section 17(1)(d) of the Summary Offences Act 1996.

“**Material or theme**” The teaching and learning resources include any spoken, written or visual text or activity. For example: text books, novels, films, plays, radio programs, multimedia, digital learning resources (video, audio, text, animations, images), lectures, speeches and performances.

*N.B. Any texts approved by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) for the VCE can be considered as appropriate for use by VCE students enrolled in the units for which the texts are approved.
(Executive Memorandum Number 98/048)*

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the College acts within DET guidelines in relation to offensive materials and themes and, in so doing, that it exercises duty of care towards students.

IMPLEMENTATION

- When developing curriculum programs and approving materials and themes, as defined above, Domain Leaders and staff will refer to Doncaster Secondary College Offensive Materials and Themes Policy.
- Staff members will consult with Domain Leaders when selecting materials and themes for study.
- Domain Leaders, in consultation with staff, will regularly review materials and themes to ensure that they are not offensive to the relevant students in the school or to their parents. Any concerns will be referred to the Principal.
- Domain Leaders and all staff will be mindful of censorship classifications when selecting resources for study. These classifications are detailed in the Teaching and Learning Resources in School Advisory Guide from DET, located in Publications for Teachers, Operations, Policies.
- In determining whether students or their parents find materials or themes to be offensive, the staff member/Coordinator/Principal will consider:
 - the words, behaviour or themes in terms of the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults;
 - the impact of the words, behaviour or themes on persons from different ethnic, religious, social or cultural backgrounds;
 - the context in which the words, behaviour or themes appear;
 - the literary, artistic or educational merit and the general character of the material or theme, including whether it is in a medical, legal or scientific journal or publication; and
 - the impact of the material or theme on the age group of the students, and how parents might react to their children studying the material or theme.
- Having considered the degree of offensiveness of the material or theme, the following actions will be taken:

If objections to materials on the grounds that they are inappropriate are anticipated, the College must inform the relevant students and their parents of the controversial nature of the resource and inform them that an alternative is available if students or parents hold a genuine and reasonable objection. Parents and students are to be informed that they have a right to object.

Students who are given an alternate study or activity should wherever possible be integrated and provided with support in the classroom program in order to ensure that the student is not isolated from their classmates.

1. Non-Offensive Material and Themes:

If the Staff member/Co-ordinator/Principal considers the materials or themes to be suitable for the relevant students and that a reasonable parent would not find them offensive, the materials or themes will be available for teachers to include in the curriculum.

2. Offensive Material and Themes:

The Principal will not approve the use of materials/themes which are likely to be regarded as offensive or obscene by the school community.

3. Potentially Offensive material and Themes:

If the Staff member/Co-ordinator/Principal considers that some of the relevant students or their parents might find the materials or themes to be slightly or mildly offensive:

- the materials or themes will be replaced with available alternative non-offensive materials or themes; or
- if no alternative materials or themes are available, the Staff member/Coordinator/Principal will:
 - reconsider the purpose of introducing students to the materials or themes;
 - assess the educational nature of the materials or themes and the manner in which they will be studied;
 - determine whether the educational value justifies its use;
 - consult, if required, the College Council (or a committee of the Council appointed for the purpose);
 - if the Principal considers the materials or themes should be used, a warning letter will be issued to parents who will be given the opportunity to raise objections.

4. Use of Rated Material:

M rated films or videos should not be shown to students in Years 7 – 9 unless under special circumstances which will be discussed with the Principal/Assistant Principal. If such a film is shown to students in Years 7 – 9, their parents will be issued a warning letter outlining the reasons for the selection of the film, and the classification of the film. In the case of students in Years 10 – 12 being shown an M/MA rated film, the class teacher will discuss with the Domain Leader the advisability of notifying the parents. X or R rated material cannot be used for any year level. Any concerns the class teacher or Domain Leader may have in showing such a film will be referred to the Principal/Assistant Principal.

Any public performance and display staged by the College will be suitable for general exhibition or else a warning letter will be issued that it (or any section of it) may offend or be unsuitable for young children.

Any objections to curriculum activities relating to allegedly offensive materials or themes will be directed to the Principal who will:

- consider the reasons for the objection, its bona fides and whether it is reasonably held;
- refer the matter to College Council if the matter is unable to be resolved through consultation;
- implement the College Council's determination in relation to the matter; and
- ensure that the College will provide alternative materials or themes if the objection is upheld.