

# Student Support Services Handbook



**Verdala**  
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

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# Introduction

## **Vision and Mission statement**

To be the international school of choice, celebrating diversity, empowering and inspiring future generations.

At VIS we strive to ensure that all of our students become knowledgeable, inquisitive and ethical contributors to our world.

## **VIS Definition of Learning**

At VIS, learning involves developing the knowledge, skills and understanding through inquiry-based and transdisciplinary strategies which prepare our lifelong learners for their future challenges. Effective learning occurs in a positive and nurturing environment, fostering a reflective growth mindset. This develops best in a context where students apply problem-solving skills to think critically and creatively in order to collaborate and take responsibility for their own learning.

We promote personal well-being through a balanced education that includes creativity, activity, academic rigour, and a service learning environment. We provide meaningful learning experiences through an inclusive educational journey which develops transferable skills, resilience, and well-grounded and mindful individuals. We strive to offer varied pathways and opportunities to enable success for all.

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## **Student Support Services Guiding Principle**

Student Support Services adopts a holistic approach to supporting the physical, academic, social and emotional well being of the child by providing a range of services. The safety and care we provide to the VIS student's welfare and wellbeing is our primary aim whilst following the VIS guiding statements and student profile.

## Social Emotional Counselling

The VIS counselling team aims to support our students in developing positive relationships and experiences within our school environment and the wider community. Our aim is to assist all students in becoming effective learners whilst maintaining a healthy well being. Each section of the school is supported by a School Social Emotional Counsellor.

Our counselling programme offers individual as well as small group counselling. Individual counselling referrals may be made by classroom teachers or other school staff, by parents or through the students themselves. Depending on the particular case and the age of the student, parents will be involved accordingly.

The School Counsellor will respect the students' right to privacy and provide an atmosphere of trust and confidence. The right of the student's privacy is significant and as such sensitive information will not be shared with others without the informed consent of the student. However, confidentiality will need to be broken when:

- There is disclosure of abuse or neglect.
- Attempted or ideation of suicide or self harm.
- Life-threatening circumstances such as the abuse of substances.

Small group counselling addresses the current needs that arise within the dynamics of a particular grade or section in a safe and caring approach. In the Early Years setting, the school counsellor will often address the issue through play, in their own classroom.

Some issues that may be addressed in counselling sessions are the following:

- Self-esteem
- Social skills
- Anger management
- Family dynamics
- Bullying
- Conflict resolutions
- Healthy lifestyle
- Online safety
- Academic responsibility and awareness
- Resiliency

Students experiencing difficulties related to mental health will be supported by the social emotional counselling services but may be advised to seek outsourced therapeutic assistance as deemed necessary.

Throughout this past scholastic year, the Student support Services have carried out sessions with students to ensure that they are coping with the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact this has left on them both individually and on a group level. When necessary a crisis intervention level was adopted to reach out to each student from K-12 considered at risk. Such students identified with heightened anxiety were monitored closely and supported as necessary. In some cases, intervention was also carried out with a whole grade cohort.

## Grief Protocol

At VIS, we do our best to provide support for grief in a social, pedagogical manner. It is imperative to point out that cultural sensitivity will be respected on a case by case basis.

The following procedures will be implemented:

- A designated staff member trained on grief and bereavement will be assigned to support the student.
- Training and awareness on grief will be implemented with whole school staff members or grade teachers as deemed necessary.
- Implement Coping with Grief workshop with students either through small group approach or grade cohort through PSHE classes or targeted sessions.
- When necessary include outside professionals / specialists on Grieving.

The family will be informed of the steps taken and documentation kept.

## University Counselling

At VIS we inform and advise students of options for university and further study. Competitive applications are submitted to universities, colleges and institutions world over to support all levels of academic rigour. We strive to counsel students in their search for universities and institutions that meet their academic, social, emotional, financial, and geographic needs. At the end of the day, we support students to graduate from High School successfully and feel confident about themselves and their journey.

Applying to universities internationally is an exciting and revealing experience, which gives students a chance to look at who they are, what they value, and what they might want to do with their life.

Whilst the application process can in itself be a daunting, demanding, and time-consuming series of events, University Counseling at VIS provides students and parents with a road map toward graduation and beyond. Guidance and support is provided to students and parents as universities / institutions are researched, preferred selection is made and the ultimate completion of the application is submitted.

For more information please refer to the [HS University Counselling Handbook](#)

## Medical Support

VIS aims to be a healthy school. As defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO), health is 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being' (WHO 1948). At VIS our school nurse can help children, young people and staff members to achieve this well-being.

### Medical/Emergency Information

Parents /Guardians have the responsibility to ensure that they provide the school with complete up-to-date information about their children's special conditions, allergies, and any short / long term health problems. The school also needs to know the persons to contact in case of an emergency. Parents / Guardians will be required to fill in the Google Emergency Details Form [see SSS Forms in Appendix], one for each child, which will be emailed at the beginning of each scholastic year. They should ensure that the school is informed when changes to any such information need to take place. Any medical condition that parents state their children have, must be supported by a recent medical certificate. If this is not provided, the school cannot be held responsible for the medical care of the student. For students with allergies that might require the use of an adrenaline pen, parents are required to fill in a Medical Allergy Alert Action Plan [[Click here for Medical Allergy Alert Action Plan](#)] endorsed by their doctor, as well as the Medical Administration Form [[Click here for Medical Administration Form](#)] Also, when parents are travelling, the appropriate Principal and the school nurse must be informed, and they are required to fill in a Parents Overseas Form (see SSS Forms in Appendix). This must be received at least 24 hours prior to the parents leaving the island.

If the student needs specific medication during the day, it is important to communicate this information, accompanied by a valid medical prescription, and also a Medical Administration Form [[click here for Medical Administration Form](#)] to the school nurse and class teacher, who is also a qualified first aider, in the nurse's absence.

## The School Nurse

The school nurse has seven main roles:

- Day-to-day medical/emergency care, to look after your physical and emotional health.
- Coordinates with the PSHE teachers, to provide support in the PSHE programme where both physical and mental health related topics are concerned. Health education topics may include nutrition, exercise, personal hygiene, puberty, addictions and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Is part of the Student Support Services Team, so as to ensure that VIS takes care of the total well-being of its students by providing a multidisciplinary team approach.
- Is part of the Occupational Health and Safety (O.H.S.) Team, to help identify hazards and develop written work procedures for them, accident investigation, school inspection, and written documentation of all these. Also helps to coordinate and provide necessary training, such as Basic First Aid Courses, Basic Life Support & AED, and Paediatric First Aid Courses.
- Liaison with parents/ guardians regarding any concerns and continuity of care.
- Liaison with external agencies and other health services to ensure that VIS meets all medical obligations with regard to Maltese Law.
- As of the scholastic year starting August 2020, the school nurse is the assigned COVID Officer for VIS.

You can visit your school nurse for a lot of different reasons. Some of these reasons might be:

- If you get in an accident whilst at school.
- If you feel ill whilst at school.
- To talk about your health.
- If you have chronic health problems, the school nurse can help you to feel supported and cared for when at school. For example, if someone has severe allergies, or asthma.
- To refer you to somebody else who can help you, for example, a doctor.
- To talk about your weight, healthy eating and need for exercise.
- To help with education about good habits that help you stay healthy, for example, good handwashing techniques, the importance of compliance to treatment to control asthma, and other matters.



- To work with the leadership team to help develop health policies and procedures for the school.

**This section covers questions you might have about going to see your school nurse.**

Q. How do I see my school nurse?

A. VIS has a 'drop-in' clinic – this is when you can go and see your school nurse without an appointment. However, as a student, you have to first inform your teacher, and then your section PA when you need to see your school nurse. The PA will then call your school nurse to make sure she is in the clinic, and not working somewhere around the school. If you would prefer to set an appointment, you can email [nurse@verdala.org](mailto:nurse@verdala.org)

Q. What will the school nurse do with the information I tell her?

A. When you talk to your school nurse you talk 'in confidence', this means that the school nurse will not talk about what you have said to other people or to the school. However, if the school nurse is concerned about your safety, for example, if you say something that makes your school nurse think that you or someone else is in danger, the school nurse will have to tell somebody else. The school nurse will tell you if she needs to do this.

Q. What if my school nurse can't help me?

A. Your school nurse can give you lots of advice and information about different health issues. The school nurse can also refer you to other professional people, so there will always be someone who can help you.

## Illness

When students become ill at school, their teacher will send the student over to their section PA, so she can inform the school nurse, and then send the student over to the nurse's clinic. The nurse will assess the child, and take any appropriate action deemed necessary. The school nurse will contact the parents in any case of injury or illness that may require further observation at home, or any further intervention from outside health professionals. It could also be the case that parents may be asked to pick up the child from school as soon as possible. Such contact will be done via a phone call, a school accident/illness form handed over through the student, or via email. It is of utmost importance that parents pick up their child as soon as possible from the school nurse clinic, as for health and safety reason, especially in these times of COVID, we have

to respect and maintain social distancing, and isolate any individual who is feeling unwell from the rest of the school community.

When your child experiences fever, diarrhoea or vomiting, kindly keep your child at home for at least 24 hours after cessation of these symptoms. We trust you understand that these are symptoms of contagious illnesses, and keeping these illnesses isolated contributes to protecting the health of the whole school community.

## Covid 19

As from August 2020, VIS has implemented new protocols which are in line with the Maltese Public Health Authorities for Covid 19 prevention. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students need to be kept home if they are experiencing any signs of sickness, and will also be sent home immediately if they experience any signs of feeling unwell at school. One can find the VIS Sickness Protocol and the Student Sickness Flowchart on the VIS official website, in the VIS Portal, username: parents, password:partnership, under COVID protocols [[Click here for VIS Sick Protocol](#)]. This flowchart stresses the importance of immediately seeing a doctor when one exhibits signs of sickness. Also, students will only be allowed back on school campus with a doctor's certificate, even if they have been sick for just one day.

In cases of suspicion of COVID-19, when a doctor, or the COVID helpline advises parents or guardians to take their child, or another member of the same household for a COVID swab test, parents/guardians have the responsibility of immediately informing their relevant section Principal, HoS and school nurse via email. This communication is essential for safeguarding the whole VIS community.

## Contagious Illness

In cases of any contagious illness, [such as but not limited to chicken pox, conjunctivitis, measles, mumps, hand foot and mouth, ringworm, head lice, molluscum contagiosum and meningitis] it is the parents' or staff member's responsibility to contact the section principal and nurse as soon as possible. The nurse will follow guidelines from the Department of Health Regulation, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, and will take action accordingly to safeguard the health of the whole school community.

Health and Safety measures, procedures and protocols have been put in place, and are regularly revised, throughout the school campus and amongst all members of the VIS community for the safety and wellbeing of everyone involved.

## Accidents

If a minor accident happens at school, the supervising staff member will accompany the child to the nurse's clinic, or call the nurse to come to the site of the accident, if that is deemed to be safer. After the appropriate first aid is given, an Accident/Illness form will be filled in by the supervising staff and the nurse, whilst a copy of the form will be sent home with the child at the end of the day (or within 24 hours of the incident) in order for the parents are informed of what happened.

In case of a serious accident or injury during school hours, parents/guardians will be informed as soon as possible, and asked to come into school. In the unlikely event of the school being unable to get in touch with either parent, or next of kin listed on the Emergency Information form, the nurse will accompany the child by ambulance to the nearest emergency medical services department. The school nurse will remain with the child until the parent/guardian takes over.

## Vaccinations

With regards to vaccination records of students, it must be stressed that V.I.S. is required to check the vaccination records of any child joining the school. It is important for VIS to do so, as the following vaccinations are compulsory by Maltese legislation:

- 3 doses of Diphtheria, Tetanus and Polio
- Rubella vaccine for girls by their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday.

If the school notes that students are missing compulsory vaccines, the parents will be advised to contact the Floriana Primary Health Centre (Immunization Services) on phone 25680222-3/21243314, to take the child to receive the immunization. They are requested to take the immunization record card/booklet for the nurse to update.

If for some reason parents refuse to have this done, the school is obliged to report to the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Unit (I.D.C.U.), and the report will be passed on to the Health Inspectorate directly to follow up.

## Head Lice

When dealing with the issue of head lice, at VIS we stress the importance for everyone in our community to work hand in hand. It is therefore essential for parents to immediately inform the school nurse via an email, if they discover that their child has head lice. In this way, the school nurse can evaluate if there is a need to send a friendly reminder to other parents to check their children for head lice. Parents are responsible to start head lice treatment on the same day that lice are found. To treat head lice at home, please follow the following procedure ([click here for Head lice protocol Flow Chart](#)). The child may return to school on the following day that treatment is commenced.

In the first week of October, a routine 'whole school' head lice screening will take place. This whole school practice is mandatory and no student/staff member is exempt from the screening. This routine standard practice will be carried out by a professional head lice screening company, that is recommended as per Maltese Government School Head Lice Guidelines.

## Inclusion at VIS

VIS is a non-selective school and we do our best to ensure that all students are respected in an inclusive community fostered and supported within our school environment. We aim to provide a structure and a system that can support diverse learning needs within the parameters of our school resources.

VIS has a strong belief that every student deserves to experience success and to this extent modification and differentiation techniques provide our students with equal opportunities to learn. Often these techniques are determined by the Individual Education Plan (IEP) which generally includes the student's educational team and / or any outside professionals involved in the student's development. Inclusive assessment arrangements are in place when imposed by psychological evaluation across all programmes.

When necessary at VIS we will guide and support the student's family with gaining a psycho-educational assessment of the child. The identification and tracking process commences by the teacher referral to the inclusion coordinator who then makes sure that observations and diagnostic motions are put into place. Meetings with outsourced professionals are also

guaranteed in order to ensure that a multidisciplinary approach is incorporated to address the student's needs. Learning Support Educators (LSEs) are at times appointed when the school feels that individual learning support is required despite the school's efforts and endeavors to meet such requirements on a mainstream level. Parents are constantly involved in the above process and decision making.

A more detailed overview can be obtained from the [VIS Inclusion Policy](#) .

## **Safeguarding Children at VIS**

VIS recognises that we are all responsible for the safeguarding of children. Moreover we aim to prevent harm to a child's wellbeing or a child who is at risk.

For more information on the procedures and response protocol adopted, please visit the [VIS Child Protection Policy](#)

## **Student Wellbeing Policies at VIS**

Within the Board Manual there exists the student wellbeing Chapter. This section involves policies which focus on the school's intervention when it comes to the student's holistic wellbeing.

The policies included in this section, currently include :

- VIS Anti-Bullying Policy
- VIS Child Protection Policy
- VIS Behaviour Policy
- VIS Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- VIS Anti-Substance Abuse Policy

[See Appendix to access these policies]

# Behaviour Management

At VIS promoting positive behaviour and respect amongst students and members of the community is key towards establishing a positive setting for learning to take place. This in turn enhances the wellbeing of all students.

Behaviour management at VIS is informed by behaviour practices outlined in the Student Conduct as well as the Elementary, Middle and High School Handbook. These practices ultimately are aimed to help students reflect on their behaviour whilst at the same time equipping them with the necessary strategies for their adjustment and success at school.

More information can be obtained from [Elementary and Early Years Parent Handbook](#); [Middle School Student-Parent Handbook](#) and / or [High School Student-Parent Handbook](#) .

*The Student Support Services Handbook is updated annually as the nature of the services and the type of information provided may change from one scholastic year to another.*

## Appendix

### Support Team Contact Information

Position	Contact Person	Email
Head of School	Ms. T. Aris	headofschool@verdala.org
High School Principal	Ms. L. Parker Jackson	vishigh@verdala.org
MS Principal	Ms. S. Boylin	vismiddle@verdala.org
ES Principal	Mr. D. Rickett	viselem@verdala.org

Position	Contact Person	Email
Director of Wellbeing	Ms. C. Borg	inco@verdala.org
University Counsellor	Ms. C. Currie	curriec@verdala.org
HS Social-Emotional Counselor	Ms. A. Zampaglione	hscounsellor@verdala.org
MS Social-Emotional Counsellor MS PSHE Teacher	Ms. A. Vella McIntyre	mscounsellor@verdala.org
ES Social-Emotional Counsellor ES PSHE Teacher	Ms. T Gottlieb	escounsellor@verdala.org
Inclusion Practitioner	Ms. P. Roncal Riveros	roncalp@verdala.org
School Nurse	Ms. Lesley Kendall	nurse@verdala.org

**Student Support Services Resources**

Policies

[Child Protection Policy](#)

[Inclusion Policy](#)

[VIS Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Policy](#)

[VIS Anti-Bullying Policy](#)

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[VIS Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy](#)

[VIS Behaviour Policy](#)

## Forms

[Student Counselling Referral Forms](#)

[Head Lice Flow Chart](#)

[Parents Overseas Notification](#)

[Accident Form](#)

[Medical Administration Form](#)

[Medical Alert Action Plan](#)

## **Professional Outsourced Associations and Institutions**

[Commissioner for Children](#)

[Agenzija Sedqa Prevention Services](#)

[Agenzija Appogg](#)

[Child Web Alert](#)

[Drug Squad](#)

[National School Support Services](#)

[National Special Education Services](#)

[National Inclusive Education Support](#)

[Agenzija Zaghzagh \[information to youth\]](#)

[Be Smart Online](#)



