

# Hate engulfs online VCE group

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THE principal of one of the schools involved in an onslaught of anti-Semitic comments on a VCE Facebook page has condemned the behaviour as “totally inappropriate”.

Speaking to *The AJN*, John Cortese, principal of Notre Dame College in Shepparton, said there was a lot of school time dedicated to discussing online bigotry, and the dangers of racism more generally.

He said the school “nowhere near condones” any such incidents. “I believe that our track record says that we jump on those sorts of things immediately.”

While the Notre Dame College student posted a crude illustration of Hitler, students from other schools around Victoria posted puns about gas chambers, concentration camps, and more.

One student wrote “How can one maintain their concentration on this group while studying for executions?” (sic), while others made a mockery of the comments, writing, for example, “These jokes are really out of Mein Kamfort zone” (sic), and “Im finding this hitlerious” (sic).

The comments were sparked by a post from a Bialik College student last week, which asked the 44,000 members of VCE Discussion Space to refrain from making offensive comments.

The student, who did not wish to



Students posted offensive jokes about the Shoah on Facebook.

Photo: Ttatty/Dreamstime.com

be named, said she felt particularly insulted by the ongoing posts as her own family was affected by the Holocaust.

“The way I’ve been brought up by my parents is to always stand up for what is right, and so I decided to take a stand and stop the hateful comments and jokes,” she explained.

Bialik principal Jeremy Stowe-Lindner praised the student’s actions, as well as those of four other Bialik students who refuted some of the harmful comments in the thread.

“Our students are strongly encouraged to speak up when there is injustice, and it is heartening that they have responded in a way that attempts to challenge, inform and de-escalate in the face of appalling bigotry,” he said.

Nonetheless, Stowe-Lindner lamented that the problem had arisen in the first place, describing the commentary as “pretty horrific”.

Meanwhile, chair of the B’nai B’rith Anti-Defamation Commission Dr Dvir Abramovich said this is yet another example of a growing crisis of anti-Semitism in Victorian schools.

“I am terribly alarmed and outraged to see the hate-filled comments, sickening taunts and hurtful remarks that were deliberately and maliciously posted on this Facebook page,” Abramovich said.

“This repugnant verbal lynching, directed at Jewish students, is a wake-up call that we have much work to do to weed out the poisonous root of prejudice.”