

CHILD SAFE POLICY

This policy reflects the DET *the Child Protection Reporting Policy and Education and Training Reform Act, Child Safe Standards, Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools, Ministerial Order No. 870*

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of this Policy is to provide clear guidelines to employees, contractors and other volunteers/visitors ('individuals') to the School regarding expectations when in direct contact students. "Direct contact" includes verbal, written or electronic communication as well as face-to-face contact.
- 1.2. This Policy defines the roles and responsibilities of school staff in protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and enables staff to:
 - a) identify indicators that a child or young person may be in need of protection
 - b) make a report about a child or young person who may be in need of protection
 - c) comply with reporting obligations under child protection law and criminal law and fulfil their duty of care

2. COMMITMENT

At the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School:

- 2.1. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.
- 2.2. We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children enrolled in our school. We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.
- 2.3. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.
- 2.4. Our school is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.
- 2.5. Our school has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers.
- 2.6. Our school is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.
- 2.7. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, LGBTQI+ children, the cultural safety of children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.
- 2.8. Our school has committed to the Safe Schools Participation Plan.
- 2.9. We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse, phone 000.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

Ministerial Order 870 provides definitions, including:

3.1. *Child abuse* includes:

- a) any act committed against a child involving: a sexual offence or an offence under section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming)
- b) the infliction, on a child, of: physical violence or serious emotional or psychological harm or serious neglect of a child.

3.2. *Child-connected work* means work authorised by the school governing authority and performed by an adult in a school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

3.3. *Child safety* encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.

3.4. *School environment* means any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the school governing authority for use by a child during or outside school hours, including:

- a) a campus of the school
- b) online school environments (including email and intranet systems)
- c) other locations provided by the school for a child's use (including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, and other events).

3.5. *School staff* being:

- a) an individual working in a school environment who is:
 - i. directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority;
 - ii. a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary); or
 - iii. a minister of religion.

4. OUR STUDENTS

4.1. This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our school. We involve them when making decisions through our Student Representative Council and representation on School Council, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

4.2. We promote diversity and tolerance in our school, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

- a) promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- b) promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex) children
- c) promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of International students
- d) promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds

- e) ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate in our specialist programs if they meet the selection criteria

5. OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- 5.1. A Working With Children Check (WWCC) is required for anyone engaged in “child-connected work” regardless of whether they are being supervised by a teacher or another adult with a WWC Check. Parents or relatives do not require a WWCC Check if they are part of an activity that their child is participating in. Visitors from another Australian State or Territory or overseas doing child-connected work in Victoria do not require a WWCC for a period of up to 30 days in the same calendar year for only one event or occasion. WWCC Checks are free for volunteers.
- 5.2. This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our school.
- 5.3. All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development or review of the code of conduct.

6. SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION

- 6.1. Support and education is important to ensure that everyone in our school understands that child safety is everyone’s responsibility.
- 6.2. Our school culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We support our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.
- 6.3. We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to:
 - a) develop their skills to protect children from abuse
 - b) promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds
 - c) promote the safety of children with a disability
 - d) promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex) children
 - e) promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of International students
- 6.4. New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our school’s commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to the school’s code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further).
- 6.5. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

7. RECRUITMENT

- 7.1. We use the recruitment processes of the Department of Education and Training.
- 7.2. We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children.
- 7.3. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities.

- 7.4. Our school understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.
- 7.5. We encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.
- 7.6. All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check.
- 7.7. We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history affected our decision-making process.
- 7.8. If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context. Recruitment material makes it clear that applicants may be cyber-vetted.

8. FAIR PROCEDURES FOR PERSONNEL

- 8.1. The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.
- 8.2. We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored in a locked office.
- 8.3. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as a school take.

9. PRIVACY

- 9.1. VCASS manages all personal and health information in accordance with Victorian privacy laws and the Department of Education and Training [Schools' Privacy Policy](#).

10. LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

- 10.1. Our school takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:
 - a) Failure to disclose: Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.
 - b) Failure to protect: People of authority commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but fail to do so.
- 10.2. Any personnel who are mandatory reporters will comply with their duties.

11. PROCEDURE

- 11.1. When aware of a substantial risk of criminal sexual abuse to a child in the school from an adult aged 18 or over associated with the school, the Principal and Child Safety Officer will act to reduce or remove the risk.
 - a) Principal/Child Safety Officer becomes aware of risk of sexual abuse to a child in school from an adult aged 18 years or over associated with the school community.
 - b) Principal/Child Safety Officer takes immediate action to reduce or remove the risk to the child. Such an action might include: if the adult concerned is a staff member, immediately

standing that person down or otherwise removing their access to students while an investigation is underway.

- c) Notify Police and/or other authorities.

12. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 12.1. In Victoria, schools are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.
- 12.2. VCASS has risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments and online environments. Such strategies include:
 - a) promoting understanding by all VCASS personnel of our expectations in relation to behaviour and conduct when interacting with children and the consequences of failing to abide by those expectations
 - b) providing ongoing training, education and support for all VCASS personnel in relation to understanding child abuse, identifying risks and areas for improvement, the School's policies and practices for reporting concerns of child abuse and how to respond
 - c) monitoring our risk management strategy and practices and evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of our risk controls

13. REGULAR REVIEW

- 13.1. This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute.

14. ALLEGATIONS, CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

- 14.1. Our school takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are supported to deal appropriately with allegations.
- 14.2. We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.
- 14.3. Any allegations, concerns or complaints should be made to the Child Safety Officer or the Principal.
- 14.4. We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).
- 14.5. If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:
 - a) a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
 - b) behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
 - c) someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
 - d) observing suspicious behaviour.

The Child Safety Officer is the Head of Student Services.

15. MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- 15.1. Please see the [Working with Children Check](#) website for further information.

- 15.2. Further information is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website about the:
- a) [Failure to disclose offence](#)
 - b) [Failure to protect offence](#)
- 15.3. Mandatory reporters (doctors, health care providers, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.
- 15.4. See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](#).
- 15.5. For more information about the [Child Safe Standards](#).
- 15.6. For more information and advice on how to protect children, create a child safe environment, identify and report signs of abuse and what your mandatory requirements are, go to [PROTECT Children](#) on the DET website.
- 15.7. This policy relates to:
- a) *Mandatory Reporting Policy*
 - b) *Student Engagement and Well-being Policy*
 - c) *Safe School Participation Plan*
 - d) *Child Safety Code of Conduct*
 - e) *Working with Children Check Policy*

REVIEW CYCLE

Status: Approved by School Council

Date: Tuesday 19 July 2016. Updated and Approved 16 October 2018

Review date: October 2019

Responsibility: Principal and School Council