

CHILD SAFE STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Introduction

"Catholic schools have a moral, legal and mission driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and where they are safe and feel safe."

(Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd 2016)

St Kevin's College is committed to child safe practice. The care, the safety and the welfare of students are embedded in policies and practices which ensure a commitment to zero tolerance of child abuse. All actions and programs will maintain high ethical standards and work in accord with child safe practices and child protection reporting guidelines. The participation and empowerment of all children is a consideration in decision-making, as we seek to provide a safe and nurturing environment where children are respected and listened to.

Furthermore, the principles of child protection (stated in the applicable Child Protection legislation and Child Protection Policy) are a fundamental responsibility of all Edmund Rice Education Australia employees and volunteers.¹ The EREA Charter uses four touchstones to describe the culture of an authentic Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition. *Liberating Education* seeks to ensure a safe and healthy environment, with the needs of all students being met. *Gospel Spirituality* gives promise to the nurturing and encouragement of all members of the community. *Inclusive Community* promotes the dignity of each person and the fostering of right relationships. Diversity is viewed as beneficial and social inclusion is paramount. This includes the recognition of the traditional ownership and cultural heritage of Indigenous Australia. *Justice and Solidarity* commits the College to advocating justice, promoting reconciliation and being a voice for those who are marginalised in the community.

The College has zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously. Our school is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks. Our school has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers. Our school is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We support and respect all children. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of children with a disability. We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

The Deputy Head serves as the Child Safe Officer in the College and is a point of contact for those who have questions or concerns, or who want to report an allegation of child abuse. The Child Safe Committee is made up of the Deputy Head, the Director of Glendalough and the Director of Students. The role of the Child Safe Committee is to actively develop and review all policies, processes and practices, informed by emerging thinking and evidence.



Training and Supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our school understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our school culture aims for all staff and volunteers (and parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and or diverse backgrounds and the safety of children with a disability.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure that 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. 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.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our school understands that when recruiting staff we have ethical as well as legislative responsibilities.

As an inclusive employer, we welcome applications from people with culturally or ethnically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

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. We carry out reference checks and police checks to ensure that we are recruiting suitable 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 the applicant's criminal record affected our decision making process.

If during the recruitment process, a person's records indicate a criminal history, then the person will be provided with the opportunity to provide further information and context.

Fair Procedures

The safety and well-being 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 and without favour.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our **incident reporting form**, including investigation updates. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide, where appropriate, updates to children and families on progress and any action that we as a school take.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure that any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it and who will have access to it.



Legislative Responsibilities

Our school takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** reporting child 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.ⁱⁱ
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our school will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sex abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove that risk but negligently fail to do so.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Grooming:** the offence of grooming prohibits predatory conduct designed to 'prepare' or 'groom' a child for future sexual activity.^{iv}
- Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.^v

Risk Management

In Victoria, schools are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children. We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments (for example, any doors that can lock) and online environments (for example staff and volunteers are permitted to only use organizational forms of telecommunication to make contact with a child in the school).

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Our school takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and in a timely manner. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations. 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.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident has taken place.

If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to a reasonable belief may be:

- A child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- Behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed^{vi}
- Someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- Observing suspicious behaviour

Relevant Legislation

Children's Services Act 1996 (Vic)

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)

Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)

Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)

Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007 (Vic)

Ministerial Order No.870 Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools (Jan 2016)

Working with Children Act 2005



References

Edmund Rice Education Australia Code of Conduct

'Betrayal of Trust Factsheet' Department of Human Services

'*Protecting the Safety and Well Being of Young People*', Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and Department of Human Services (Vic) May 2010 © State of Victoria 2010

A Step by Step Guide to Making a Report to Child Protection or Child FIRST (DHS)

Overview of the Victorian Child Safe Standards

Policy 2.19 Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse CEM (Catholic Education Melbourne)

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or when there is a change in legislation. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we will do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

ⁱ Edmund Rice Education Australia Code of Conduct (revised Apr 2018) s.3

ⁱⁱ A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Department of Justice website for further details of this offence.

^{iv} S49B (2) Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)

^v Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, 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.

^{vi} See Overview of Victorian Child Safe Standards

