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Focus on Child Safety

Mount Evelyn Christian School



MECS Vision
Seeking the
Kingdom of God
in Education



Our Mission
We provide Parent-governed, Christ-centred schooling with learning experiences that challenge each student to actively live for God in His world, while partnering with Christian parents in the nurture of their children at a price affordable to those who are committed.



Child Safety Policy (6.5.5)

Preamble

Ministerial Order 870 outlines the requirements for schools in implementing the following minimum child safety standards:

Standard 1: Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements

Standard 2: A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety

Standard 3: A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children

Standard 4: Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel

Standard 5: Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse

Standard 6: Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

Standard 7: Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.

This policy seeks to implement child safe standards that exceed the minimum standards of the Ministerial Order.

This policy applies to all school employees, volunteers, and contractors.

This Child Safety Policy connects to the following policies: 6.9.1 Educational Support Policy; 6.4.1 Student Discipline and Behaviour Policy; 6.5.1 Student Welfare Policy; 6.5.2 Mandatory Reporting Policy; 6.5.3 Prohibited Substances Policy; 6.5.4 Bullying and Harassment Policy; and 6.6.1 Student Grievance and Dispute Resolution Policy.



Rationale

In our Educational Creed, among other things:

WE CONFESS that people, as God's image-bearers, are given dominion over the creation to rule it, manage it and develop it for God, who is King over Kings and Lord over Lords;

That human life is fulfilled only in a life of free, willing submission to God; a life lived in harmony with the law of God for his creation made known in the integral revelation of the Word of God;

That being now fallen into sin, people can attain this fulfilment only through renewal by the Holy Spirit after the image of his Creator;

That for people to attempt anything at all in independence of God or in ignorance of God's revelation is inherently destructive of humanity and of the creation over which they are given dominion;

That it is a person's glory, as God's image-bearer to do everything so that the glory of God is revealed in their doing;

That the development of the child as the image-bearer of God is a central concern of the educational task.

Consequently, any action or behaviour that results in the abuse of a child who is part of our community, or violates their safety, is completely rejected by us because of its destructive nature. This policy therefore outlines how our school seeks to prevent such abuse.



Guiding Principles

All students have a right to be safe and feel safe from all forms of abuse and neglect.

The school works in partnership with families to ensure that they are engaged in decision making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and protection.

The school is responsible to provide an effective education to students in all aspects of personal safety, in partnership with their parents/guardians/caregivers.

All adults in our school, including teaching and nonteaching staff, parents, visiting specialists, volunteers, and contractors, have a responsibility to protect children from any kind of harm or abuse.

Our policies regarding child safety will exceed mere compliance with legislative requirements. Our practices will demonstrate cooperation with governments, the police and human services agencies.

Staff, volunteers, contractors, parents and students should feel free to raise concerns about child safety, knowing these will be taken seriously by school leadership.

Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally or pastorally.

Commitment to child safety

Our school is committed to child wellbeing and safety.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our policies and procedures.

Our school is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

We seek to develop a caring community in which children, parents, staff and volunteers are loved and respected.

We are committed to listening to our students so that they are empowered to be active participants in our school, consequently we take their views seriously and address concerns they raise with us.

We are committed to teaching our students in an age appropriate manner the necessary skills and understanding to maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.

We communicate with, and listen to, the views of parents and carers about the wellbeing of their children and our child safety policies and procedures.

We rigorously follow our legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety.

Our school has human resources and recruitment practices for staff and volunteers that minimise the risk of child abuse.

We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal 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.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.



Implementation

Organisational Responsibilities

Everyone who works at the school as an employee or volunteer is responsible to understand the important role they play to ensure the wellbeing and safety of all students.

The Assistant Principals (APs) and Kindergarten Director will oversee the implementation of this policy on behalf of the Principal in their section of the school.

The APs and Kindergarten Director will ensure that all staff and volunteers are informed of their requirements in regards to Mandatory Reporting and are aware that all issues need to be handled sensitively and promptly.

General staff meetings and morning staff briefings enable the communication and dissemination of information that involves issues of child safety.



The School Executive appoints the Assistant Principal Primary (APP), Assistant Principal Secondary (APS) and the Kindergarten Director to be Child Safety Officers within the school and to facilitate the implementation of this policy. If unavailable, then under the guidance of other Executive members, section coordinators will assume such responsibilities. It is the relevant Child Safety Officer or the Student Welfare Officer who is usually the conduit between government bodies such as the Department of Human Services, Child FIRST, the Police, the Court system, and the school.

It is the role of the Child Safety Officers to assist members of the school community, who have concerns in regards to an individual student's safety, in reporting these concerns to the appropriate authority.

The Principal is responsible for the reviewing of school procedures in order to gauge the effectiveness of the school in managing its child safe strategies and to ensure that the policy is distributed to all members of the school community and is visible to the wider community on the school website.

School Leadership Responsibilities

The School Board, Principal, Assistant Principals, Administration Manager, and all school leaders must exercise their particular responsibility in ensuring the development of strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of and shared responsibility for child safety.

As such these leaders seek to:

- Create an environment for students to be safe and to feel safe.
- Uphold our principles and standards for all staff, parents, volunteers, and contractors.
- Promote respectful models of behaviour between adults and children.
- Ensure that thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment and screening of staff and volunteers.
- Ensure that staff have effective and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of child safety matters, and enhance ability to address such matters.
- Regularly clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to child protection and wellbeing ensuring the school meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 870.

School Staff Responsibilities

School staff (employees, volunteers, and contractors) are responsible to:

- Treat children with dignity and respect, act with propriety, provide a duty of care, and protect children in their care.
- Follow legislative and school processes in the course of their work, if they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected.
- Provide a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children is nurtured.
- Undertake regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety.
- Assist children to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse.
- Maintain currency of Working with Children Check Card or professional registration requirements such as Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration (as relevant).
- Follow the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct.



Child Safety Code of Conduct

All staff, volunteers, contractors, and board members are responsible for supporting the safety of children as follows:

Positive Behaviours

- Uphold and implement the school's commitment to child safety at all times.
- Listen and respond to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused or that they are worried about their own safety or the safety of another child.
- Promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Ensure the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse background by having a zero tolerance of discrimination.
- Uphold the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability.
- Ensure that as far as practicable adults are not alone with a child.
- Report any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns to an Assistant Principal and to the school leadership team.
- Comply with all reporting obligations as they relate to Mandatory Reporting.
- Where allegations of child abuse are made, ensure as quickly as possible, that the individual/s are safe.
- Report to the Victorian Institute of Teaching, any charges, committals for trial, or convictions in relation to a sexual offence, by a registered teacher, or certain allegations or concerns about a registered teacher.



Unacceptable Behaviours

- Must not disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse.
- Must not develop any special relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism.
- Must not exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical.
- Must not put children at risk of abuse through isolation (for example by locking doors).
- Must not initiate unnecessary physical contact with children or do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves.
- Must not engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (for example, personal social activities).
- Must not use inappropriate language in the presence of children.
- Must not express derogatory views on cultures, race, or sexuality in the presence of children.
- Must not discriminate against any child in regards to age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability, sexuality, ethnicity or disability.
- Must not have private or isolated contact with a child or their family outside of school without appropriate discussion with an Executive staff member (for example, unauthorised afterhours tutoring, private instrumental/other lessons or sport coaching, babysitting). This does not preclude normal social interaction between families of the school community. Nor does it preclude incidental contact (such as seeing a student in the street).
- Must not have any online contact of a personal or confidential nature with a child (including by social media, email, instant messaging, etc.) or their family unless necessary for enabling students' school work through the school's learning management system or email system.
- Must not use photographs or video of a child without the consent of the parent or guardians.
- Must not work with children whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs (whether prescription or illegal).
- Must not consume alcohol at school or at school events in the presence of children; except for events that are authorised by the school Board.

The school provides a mechanism to record the acknowledgement that all staff and volunteers have an understanding of this code of conduct and a commitment to adhere to it.



Students

We actively encourage all students to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them.

Students will learn about what they can do if they feel unsafe. We enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report on child safety issues.

We empower student leaders to voice concerns or forward suggestions that can make the school a safer learning environment.

Students are reminded that they can directly approach the Assistant Principals, Student Welfare Officer, Coordinators, their teachers and First Aid Officers to seek advice or receive assistance.

The school also promotes child safety through the curriculum in appropriate places.

Recruitment of School Staff and Volunteers

The school applies effective screening processes in the recruitment of its employees and volunteers. Our commitment to child safety and our screening requirements are provided to all applicants for paid or voluntary positions. This means that application packs must include a copy of the school's Child Safety Policy (which includes the Child Safety Code of Conduct).

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child connected work, we:

- obtain proof of personal identity and any professional or other qualifications
- confirm the applicant's Working with Children Check and/or National Police Check status and/or professional registration (as relevant)
- verify the applicant's history of work involving children
- obtain references that address the applicant's suitability for the job and working with children.



Ongoing requirements for School Staff

We monitor and assess the continuing suitability of school staff to work with children, through regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks and staff professional registration requirements such as Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration.

The school provides employees, volunteers and contractors with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge and abilities in relation to child safety matters. This includes induction, ongoing training and professional learning to ensure that everyone understands their professional and legal obligations and responsibilities, and the procedures for reporting suspicion of child abuse and neglect.



Responding to Abuse

Our school complies with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.), the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.). In that light:

We recognise that while the child safe standards focus on organisations, every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether in this organisation or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities.

We recognise that the failure to disclose criminal offence, requires all adults (aged 18 and over) who hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16, to disclose that information to police (unless they have a reasonable excuse not to, for example because they fear for their safety or the safety of another).

We note that more information about failure to disclose is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>

We recognise that while failure to disclose only covers child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting responsibilities for our principals, teachers and early childhood educators.

We note that the Department of Health and Human Services website provides information about how to make a report to child protection <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>.



We recognise that the failure to protect criminal offence (commenced on 1 July 2015), applies where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation, will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.

We note that further information about failure to protect can be found on the Department of Justice and Regulation website <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence, and the Department of Health and Human Services website>.



Our Mandatory Reporting Policy sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child at our school is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed, and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report.

The school records any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct, and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements.

We train staff to identify the indicators of a child or young person who may be in need of protection, understand how a 'reasonable belief' is formed, make a report of a child or young person who may be in need of protection, and comply with mandatory reporting obligations under child protection law and their legal obligations relating to criminal child abuse and grooming under criminal law.

Responding if a parent/carer/student discloses or reports abuse in our school or Kindergarten or raises a safety concern

If a parent or carer advises that their child has been abused in the school or kindergarten or raises a safety concern regarding their child, the following steps must be taken:

- Determine and advise the relevant Child Safety Officer to work with the parent or carer through the response process.
- Explain that we ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously.
- Ask about the wellbeing of the child.
- Act in relation to the well-being of the child.

The following steps will be carried out by the relevant Child Safety Officer:

- Allow the parent/carer/student to talk through the incident in their own words (be sensitive to the need for an interpreter in the case of someone from a non-English speaking background, or the need for support where the parent/carer or child has hearing or cognitive impairments (see advice on communicating with people with a disability on the Department of Health and Human Services website www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/people-with-a-disability-in-the-community/communicate-and-consult-with-people-with-a-disability/communication-with-people-with-disabilities).

- Advise the parent/carer that you will take notes during the discussion to capture all details.
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the School Executive or Child Safety Officer, the police or child protection.
- Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together if appropriate.
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be.
- Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.
- If an allegation of abuse involves an Aboriginal child, ensure a culturally appropriate response.

Our Grievance and Dispute Resolution Policy may also be relevant in such circumstances.



Breaches

Where an employee is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this Policy, the Principal shall enact the processes of this policy and the Staff Performance Counselling and Discipline Policy.

Where a member of the School Executive is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the concerned party should contact the school Board. In such cases the Board Chair shall enact the processes of this policy and the Executive & Board Performance and Discipline Policy.



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