



Catholic Schools Child Safe Schools

Child Safe Standard 1

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

Rationale

The moral focus embedded in Catholic school culture, to uphold the dignity of each person and to strive for the full flourishing of each student, obliges Catholic schools to establish and continually improve the culture of child safety throughout all levels of the organisation. Preventing child abuse and responding appropriately to allegations and concerns needs to be embedded in the everyday thinking and practice of all within the school community.

Every person involved in Catholic education has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make (Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd 2016).

In Brief

Standard 1 points strongly to the role and commitment of leadership to ensure that the ethical imperative of keeping children safe is recognised, understood, valued and upheld by all staff, volunteers and community members within the school. Establishing and implementing reliable and effective child safe policies, strategies and practices within a school will generally require significant cultural change. To attain the necessary cultural shift, attention needs to be paid to the capacity of leadership; the quality of policies and practices; the level of commitment to child safety; processes for identifying, communicating, reporting and addressing concerning behaviour and allegations of abuse; and the level of commitment to transparency and continuous improvement.

Ministerial Order Requirements

The Victorian government has introduced minimum Child Safe Standards into law to ensure organisations providing services for children create child-safe environments. In accordance with [Ministerial Order No. 870](#) (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2016) all Victorian schools are required to comply with these standards as part of their registration requirements.

The Ministerial Order specifies the following requirements for schools with respect to Standard 1:

The school governing authority must:

- develop strategies to embed a culture of child safety at the school*
- allocate roles and responsibilities for achieving the strategies*
- inform the school community about the strategies, and allocated roles and responsibilities;*
- put the strategies into practice, and inform the school community about these practices*
- periodically review the effectiveness of the strategies put into practice and, if considered appropriate, revise those strategies.*

Ongoing Compliance

- Schedule a school audit of child-safe policies and practices and develop a Plan of Action to ensure ongoing compliance against the Ministerial Order.
- Allocate and document roles and responsibilities for child safety to staff members.

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- Consider creating child safety officer/leadership positions and developing a clear statement of responsibilities in the school.
- Consider creating a child safety team to support ongoing effective implementation of the Victorian Child Safe Standards.
- Conduct professional learning sessions for all school staff to ensure a high degree of awareness of the child safety reforms and other related legislation.
- Include child safety as a standing item on leadership team and staff meeting agendas.
- Ensure communication and line of sight to your school governing authority.
- Ensure that the goal of child safety is embedded in school documentation and conveys the vision, mission and strategic direction of the school.
- Consult with staff, and the wider school community to inform strategic decisions about child safety.
- Foster a culture of transparency and open communication which empowers all members of the community to discuss child safety and raise any concerns about child abuse.
- Establish a system for regular review and improvement of child safety related policies and practices.

Sustaining a Culture of Child Safety

- Embed a child safety team to continue implementation and monitor effectiveness.
- Maintain child safety as an ongoing item on leadership team and staff meeting agendas.
- Demonstrate the school's commitment to child safety (behavioural, written and verbal).
- Provide ongoing opportunities for staff, students, parents and the school community to engage with child safety (e.g. community forums).
- Consider incorporating child safety questions in existing surveys.
- Provide ongoing induction and training for all staff and volunteers in child safety including how to recognise and respond to child abuse.

- Build responsibility for embedding an organisational culture of child safety into all position descriptions; and into performance arrangements for school staff.
- Continue to build deeper knowledge about child safety among key staff.
- Enable professional learning and training of staff to build deeper understandings of child safety and prevention of abuse.
- Promote a culture of inclusion around child safety that recognises and values the diversity within the community.

Indicators of Effective Implementation

Typical features of a school organisational culture and climate where child safety is paramount and embedded include:

- the presence of documented strategies to embed a culture of safety at the school, with the school community kept informed of these strategies
- clear procedures and designated roles and responsibilities for child safety that are widely known and understood by the school community
- arrangements for communicating child safety issues and concerns to leadership that are clear, transparent, and accessible to all
- evidence that child safety is a core part of the school's public and internal communication and that the school provides a secure and supportive environment whereby all community members can raise child safety concerns
- that the school is especially vigilant in supporting the wellbeing of the most vulnerable children
- regular and ongoing dialogue regarding child safety within the school community
- a commitment to continuous improvement and a periodic review of the effectiveness of the child-safe strategies the school has planned and implemented.



Resources

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2021, *Employee Relations*, accessed 8 April 2021 www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/Employee-Relations/Child-Safety-Reportable-Conduct. For information about and resources from the CECV Employee Relations Unit.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2016, *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse website*, accessed 16 May 2016 www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au. For information about the focus of the Royal Commission including its research agenda and reports

State of Victoria, Commission for Children and Young People 2018, *A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation*, Version 4, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, accessed 8 April 2021 <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/CSSGuideFinalV4-Web-New.pdf>.

State of Victoria, Department of Justice 2016, *Betrayal of Trust implementation*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, accessed 8 April 2021 www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/betrayal-of-trust-implementation

Truth, Justice and Healing Council 2016, *Melbourne Response*, Truth Justice and Healing Council, Canberra, accessed 16 May 2016 www.tjhcouncil.org.au/about-us/about-the-council.aspx. For information about the Catholic Church's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority (VRQA) 2021, *Child Safe Standards*, State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training), Melbourne, accessed 8 April 2021 www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafepages/Home.aspx. For compliance information and advice on implementation of Ministerial Order No. 870 by the regulatory authority responsible for the registration of Victorian schools.

References

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2016, *Commitment Statement to Child Safety: A safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people in Catholic schools*, CECV, East Melbourne, accessed 16 May 2016 www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/getmedia/b5d43278-51b9-4704-b45a-f14e50546a70/Commitment-Statement-A4.aspx.

State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2016, *Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools Ministerial Order No. 870*, Education & Training Reform Act 2006, Gazette No. S2, accessed 16 May 2016 www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2016/GG2016S002.pdf. †