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

Rationale

Implementing a risk-management approach is a critical part of a school's duty of care and recognition of its legal responsibility to ensure the safety of children. A structured approach provides a system of assurance and ensures that the various strategies for child safety do not work in isolation.

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) Commitment Statement to Child Safety stresses that the care, safety and wellbeing of children are 'a central and fundamental responsibility of Catholic Education … inherent to the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ' (CECV 2016).

> While the context and reality at each Catholic school will differ, the fundamental issues of understanding effective practices in child safety and identifying and responding to child harm remain the same. All schools must strive for continual improvement that is responsive to emerging thinking, evidence and practice, so as to eliminate the possibility of abuse occurring in the first place (CECV 2016).

In Brief

Standard 6 emphasises the importance of incorporating robust, structured risk-management processes for establishing a child-safe environment. Consideration of possible risk factors needs to be broad-based and include the diverse range of contexts, environments, relationships and activities that children within a school community engage in, as well as the varied and distinctive characteristics that they demonstrate. Where risks are identified, schools are required to implement measures to reduce or remove them.

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 regarding Standard 6.

1. *The school governing authority must develop and implement risk management strategies regarding child safety in school environments.*

2. *The school's risk management strategies regarding child safety must identify and mitigate the risk(s) of child abuse in school environments by taking into account the nature of each school environment, the activities expected to be conducted in that environment (including the provision of services by contractors or outside organisations), and the characteristics and needs of all children expected to be present in that environment.*

3. *If the school governing authority identifies risks of child abuse occurring in one or more school environments the authority must make a record of those risks and specify the action(s) the school will take to reduce or remove the risks (risk controls).*

Explanatory note: Different risk controls may be necessary for particular groups of children depending on the nature of the risk and the diversity characteristics of children affected by the risk.

4. *As part of its risk management strategy and practices, the school governing authority must monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of its risk controls.*

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5. *At least annually, the school governing authority must ensure that appropriate guidance and training is provided to the individual members of the school governing authority and school staff about:*
   a. *individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse;*
   b. *child abuse risks in the school environment; and*
   c. *the school's current child safety standards (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2016)*

Ongoing Compliance

- Develop and implement risk-management strategies and risk-assessment processes regarding child safety in the school environment, and incorporate these into current risk-management practices.

- Identify and mitigate risks by taking into account the nature of the school environment; all the activities that are expected to be conducted within the school environment; and the characteristics and needs of all children that are expected to be present in the school environment. To do this:

  – consult with students, staff and families
  – scan your physical and virtual environments for risks
  – think about how your activities and staffing and processes might impact risks
  – understand the vulnerabilities of the children who you work with
  – look at any previous reports or incidents in your organisation and how you responded.

- Ensure that the supervision requirements for staff and volunteers who work with children in the school are considered as part of your risks.

- For the risks identified, the school governing authority must record those risks, specify the actions the school will take to reduce or remove the risks, and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of implementing the specified risk controls. This may be most effectively completed through the school's risk register.

- Ensure that processes for evaluating risks posed by situations and activities relevant to your particular school environments and the characteristics of the children in the school are clear and accessible.

- Provide relevant staff and volunteers with training in identifying child-abuse risks.

- Understand the social and cultural factors that contribute to child safety risks.

- Recognise and adapt to the needs of particular children and communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, culturally and/or linguistically diverse children and children with a disability.

Sustaining a Culture of Child Safety

- At least annually, ensure that appropriate guidance and training is provided to individual members of the school's governing authority and school staff regarding their obligations and responsibilities for managing risk of child abuse; child abuse risks in the school environment; and the school's current child safety standards.

- Ensure the child-safety risk-management strategies are integrated into the school's broader risk plan.

- Ensure that child safety risk assessments (beyond OHS) are considered and recorded when planning off-site activities and are evaluated post-activity.

- Implement processes for periodic review of risk-management approaches, in particular following any incidents.

- Include discussion about apparent risks or 'near misses' and areas for improvement (in leadership team meetings and staff meetings).

Indicators of Effective Implementation

Typical features of a school where a risk-management approach is embedded are that:

- the school recognises child safety risk management as a tool for improvement not a compliance exercise.

- the school risk-management plan incorporates risk management assessments and strategies regarding child safety

- the school risk management plan is discussed and accessible to staff

- situational risks within the school's environment are considered and understood by all personnel, staff and volunteers

- procedures are in place to reduce or remove risks within the school environment

- risk-management approaches are regularly reflected on and improved

- specific risks to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, culturally and/or linguistically diverse children and children with a disability are identified, assessed and mitigated

- staff understand the key risk indicators of abuse and they bring these matters to the attention of the appropriate person at the school.

Resources

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2021, *Employee Relations Page*, 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. For information about the Betrayal of Trust Inquiry response including Criminal Law reform.

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 16 May 2016 www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafe/Pages/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. †