Child Safety Policy

Purpose:	The Fitra Community School Child Safety Policy demonstrates our school's commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child-friendly organisation, where children and young people are safe and feel safe. This policy provides an overview of our school's approach to implementing Ministerial Order 1359 which sets out how the Victorian Child Safe Standards apply in school environments. It informs our school community of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and guides our processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing of students across all areas of our work.
Scope:	This policy: · applies to all school staff, volunteers, contractors and the broader school community whether or not they work in direct contact with students. It also applies to School Board members where indicated. · applies in all physical and online school environments used by students during or outside of school hours, including other locations provided by for a student's use (for example, a school camp) and those provided through third-party providers · should be read together with our other child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and codes – refer to the related school policies section below.
Implemented by:	School Board & Principal (where specifically delegated or stated in this Policy)
Approved by:	School Board
Effective Date:	May 2024
Review Date:	December 2026

Definitions

The following terms in this policy have specific definitions:

- child
- child safety
- child abuse
- child-connected work
- child-related work
- school environment
- school staff
- school governing authority
- student
- volunteer.

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Fitra Community School is a child safe organisation which welcomes all children, young people and their families.

We are committed to providing environments where our students are safe and feel safe, where their participation is valued, their views respected, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Our child safe policies, strategies and practices are inclusive of the needs of all children and students.

We have no tolerance for child abuse and take proactive steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to students in our school environments.

We promote positive relationships between students and adults and between students and their peers. These relationships are based on trust and respect.

We take proactive steps to identify and manage any risk of harm to students in our school environment. When child safety concerns are raised or identified, we treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly.

Particular attention is given to the child safety needs of students who present with characteristics that make them more at risk or vulnerable, whether that be their race, place of origin, family circumstances, identity or ability. Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting students based on such characteristics, are not tolerated at our school, and any instances identified will be addressed in accordance with the School's policies and procedures, including the bullying and harassment policy.

Child safety is a shared responsibility. Every person involved in our school has an important role in

promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising any issues or concerns about a child's safety.

We are committed to regularly reviewing our child safe practices, and seeking input from our students, families, staff, and volunteers to inform our ongoing strategies.

Roles and Responsibilities

Principal

The Principal is responsible for ensuring that a strong child safe culture is created and maintained, and that policies and practices are effectively developed and implemented in accordance with Ministerial Order 1359.

The Principal will:

- ensure effective child safety and wellbeing governance, policies, procedures, codes and practices are in place and followed
- model a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of students, families and staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety and wellbeing
- enable inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all students are considered
- reinforce high standards of respectful behaviour between students and adults, and between students
- promote regular open discussion on child safety issues within the school community including at staff meetings and School Board meetings
- facilitate regular professional learning for staff and volunteers (where appropriate) to build deeper understandings of child safety, cultural safety, student wellbeing and prevention of responding to abuse
- create an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are readily raised, and no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities.

School staff and volunteers

All staff and volunteers will:

- participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and training provided by the school, and always follow the school's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures
- act in accordance with our Child Safety Code of Conduct (set out in Appendix 1)
- identify and raise concerns about child safety issues in accordance with our Mandatory Reporting Policy, Other Child Safety Reporting Obligations Policy, Reportable Conduct Policy and Processes for Responding to and Reporting Suspected Child Abuse (set out in Appendix 2) (together referred to as the ***Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures***), including following the Four Critical Actions for Schools
- ensure students' views are taken seriously and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives

- implement inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of students.

School Board

School Board members will:

- champion and promote a child safe culture with the broader school community
- ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at School Board meetings
- undertake annual training on child safety, utilising the Child Safe Standards training slides available on PROTECT.
- approve updates to, and act in accordance with the Child Safety Code of Conduct to the extent that it applies to School Board members
- when hiring employees, ensure that selection, supervision, and management practices are child safe (At our school, School Board employment duties are delegated to the principal who is bound by this policy).

Specific staff child safety responsibilities

Our Principal is the first point of contact for child safety concerns or queries and for coordinating responses to child safety incidents.

The Principal is responsible for monitoring the school's compliance with the Child Safety Policy. Anyone in our school community should approach the Principal if they have any concerns about the school's compliance with the Child Safety Policy.

The principal is responsible for informing the school community about this policy, and making it publicly available.

Other specific roles and responsibilities are named in other child safety policies and procedures, including the Child Safety Code of Conduct, Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures, and Child Safety Risk Register.

The School Board monitors the Child Safety Risk Register.

Child Safety Code of Conduct (set out in Appendix 1)

Our Child Safety Code of Conduct sets the boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviours between adults and students. It also clarifies behaviours that are not acceptable in our physical and online environments.

We ensure that students also know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable so that they can be clear and confident about what to expect from adults in the school.

The Child Safety Code of Conduct also includes processes to report inappropriate behaviour.

Managing Risks to Child Safety and Wellbeing

At our school we identify, assess and manage risks to child safety and wellbeing in our physical and online school environments. These risks are managed through our child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices, and in our activity specific risk registers, such as those we develop for off-site overnight camps, adventure activities and facilities and services we contract through third party providers for student use.

Our Child Safety Risk Register is used to record any identified risks related to child abuse alongside actions in place to manage those risks. The School Board will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the actions in the Child Safety Risk Register at least annually.

Cultural Safety

At Fitra Community School, we are committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe school where the strengths of Aboriginal culture, values and practices are respected.

We think about how every student can have a positive experience in a safe environment. For Aboriginal students, we recognise the link between Aboriginal culture, identity and safety and actively create opportunities for Aboriginal students and the Aboriginal community to have a voice and presence in our school planning, policies, and activities.

We have developed the following strategies to promote cultural safety in our school community:

- Make Aboriginal voice part of decision making in matters that affect Aboriginal students.
- Celebrate the local Aboriginal community through naming sections of the school premises after the local Aboriginal community.
- Build school wide knowledge of Aboriginal histories, cultures, perspectives, values, skills and attitudes.
- Acknowledge and draw on the existing knowledge of Aboriginal students and their families.
- Having Aboriginal books in the School library.
- Ask for feedback from Aboriginal students and their families about what the school does well, and what can be improved.
- Address racism from students, staff, volunteers or visitors directly. Make sure racist speech or actions are always dealt with, and the culture of the school works to prevent incidents from occurring.
- Train staff and volunteers to understand the importance of Aboriginal culture to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal students.

Student Empowerment

To support child safety and wellbeing at Fitra Community School, we work to create an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages students and families to contribute to our child safety

approach and understand their rights and their responsibilities. We do this in a range of ways including::

- Implementing the *Keeping Ourselves Safe at Fitra Program* a whole school protective behaviours program aimed at providing students across all year levels with age appropriate tools and strategies to face potential unsafe situations and environments. This is delivered through health classes across the school and during morning meetings.
- Daily whole school morning meetings where students are given the opportunity to contribute opinions, discuss ideas, partake in decision making in addition to learning about and reinforcing the importance of friendships, emotional literacy, personal strengths, positive coping and problem solving skills. Morning meetings are also where students' knowledge about their rights to safety, information and participation is reinforced.
- Daily whole school closing circles where students have the opportunity to reflect on their day and raise concerns.
- Application of the School's *Behaviour Management Policy*
- Ensuring that teachers on yard duty are actively listening to students' concerns and encouraging them to express their views and see what further actions need to be taken as per the On site supervision of Students Policy.

We inform students of their rights through our whole school *Keeping Ourselves Safe at Fitra Program* as noted above and give students the knowledge, skills and confidence to recognise unsafe situations with adults or other students and to speak up and act on concerns relating to themselves or their peers. We ensure our students know who to talk to if they are worried or feeling unsafe and we encourage them to share concerns with a trusted adult at any time. Students and families can also access information on how to report concerns in the School's Concerns and Complaints Policy.

When the school is gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct or abuse of a child, we will listen to the complainant's account and take them seriously, check our understanding of the complaint, support the student and keep them (and their parents and carers, as appropriate) informed about progress.

Family Engagement

Our families and the school community have an important role in monitoring and promoting children's safety and wellbeing and helping children to raise any concerns.

To support family engagement, at Fitra Community School we are committed to providing families and community with accessible information about our school's child safe policies and practices and involving them in our approach to child safety and wellbeing.

We will create opportunities for families to have input into the development and review of our child safety policies and practices and encourage them to raise any concerns and ideas for improvement.

We do this by:

- Asking parents and carers about their children, both through formal settings like parent/teacher interviews and during chance meetings at pick-up and drop-off.
- Making all of our child safety policies and procedures available for parents on the Compass school management system.
- Displaying Child Safety posters at the School.
- Communicating child safety policies and procedures via regular email communication with parents and providing opportunities for parents and carers to suggest ideas for improvement via such communications.

Diversity & Equity

As a child safe organisation that is grounded in the Islamic tradition, we celebrate the rich diversity of our students, families and community and promote respectful environments that are free from discrimination. Our focus is on wellbeing and growth for all.

We recognise that every child has unique skills, strengths and experiences to draw on.

We pay particular attention to individuals and groups of children and young people in our community with additional and specific needs. This includes tailoring our child safety strategies and supports to the needs of students who present with characteristics that make them more at risk or vulnerable, whether that be their race, place of origin, family circumstances, identity or ability.

Our Student Welfare Policy and Equal Opportunity & Anti-Harassment Policy provides more information about the measures we have in place to support diversity and equity.

Suitable Staff & Volunteers

At Fitra Community School, we apply robust child safe recruitment, induction, training, and supervision practices to ensure that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are suitable to work with children.

Staff recruitment

The central aspect of recruitment and employment at the School is making sure the candidate is a good fit in terms of their disposition and attitude as well as having relevant experience, qualifications, credentials and a strong alignment with the School's values.

The recruitment process contains a number of steps as follows, which are to be performed by the Principal or their delegate (if appropriate in the circumstances):

- Identify a need within the school based on retirement, resignation or changing student or school requirements

- Draw up the parameters of the position and update Job Descriptions as required. Ensuring that details of job requirements, qualifications, skills, other attributes etc. are included in the advertisement, including references to being a Child Safe School, etc
- Create an advertisement and place the advertisement in an appropriate form of media (this may include a newspaper like The Age; The ISV website, recruitment website like Seek.com, on social media and the Fitra website as required) including a timeline for accepting applications. Advertisements that appear on our website and that of ISV must contain references to Fitra's commitment to child safety, refer to our Code of Conduct and Child Safety policy and a reference to rigorous background checks including a Working with Children Check, police, identity checks and Right to Work in Australia check. This must also include a reference to participation and empowerment of all children, including those with a disability or those from diverse cultural backgrounds, including children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands
- Ensure that the Job Description is up to date
- Accept all applications and acknowledge each in writing
- Organise interviews for shortlisted candidates at a mutually suitable time. Refer to interview and selection process below.
- Conduct background and referee checks. Refer to interview and selection process below.
- Prepare a contract and send to the successful candidate including a letter of offer, terms and conditions of employment etc.
- Notify unsuccessful candidates who were shortlisted
- Provide verbal feedback to unsuccessful candidates upon request.

Interview & Selection Process

The interview process will be conducted in a friendly and welcoming way which allows a candidate to respond well in the interview.

Candidates will be asked questions from a prepared set of questions which include questions about practice and experience and also more general questions about their attitudes, interests, etc. They will also be given the opportunity to ask the panel questions.

As part of the Child Safe requirements, candidates will also be required to answer questions about their behaviour with children, motivation for seeking employment amongst children and also some questions around their employment history and attitudes.

Following the selection of a successful candidate the Principal or their delegate (as appropriate in the circumstances) will conduct background and referee checks. Background checks will include confirming the currency of Working with Children Check/Victorian Institute of Teaching registration. Reference checks will involve the successful candidate being requested to provide at least two referees (preferably from their current/most recent employer and direct supervisor/line manager) who can confirm the

person's suitability for child connected work. In conducting reference checks, referees will be asked specific questions about whether the referee would hire the person again, particularly in a role working with children, and whether they have any concerns about the applicant working with children.

The Contract

A Fitra Community School contract will contain the following details:

- A letter of offer
- Employment entitlements
- Position details
- Position description
- Remuneration
- General employment requirements
- Confirmation of the right to work in Australia
- Statutory Declaration
- Work Information Statement

Staff induction

All newly appointed staff will be expected to participate in our child safety and wellbeing induction program. The program will include a focus on:

- the Child Safety Policy (this document)
- the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures and
- any other child safety and wellbeing information that school leadership considers appropriate to the nature of the role.

Ongoing supervision and management of staff

All staff engaged in child-connected work will be supervised appropriately to ensure that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate.

Staff will be monitored and assessed to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work. This will be done by day to day observation and formal performance reviews.

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly and in accordance

with our school policies and our legal obligations. Child safety and wellbeing will be paramount.

Additional steps that the School will take in the ongoing supervision and management of staff to promote child safe practices include:

- Communicating regularly with staff and volunteers about the Child Safety Policy and Code of Conduct in staff and volunteer meetings.
- Providing refresher child safe training for staff and volunteers.

Child Safety Knowledge, Skills and Awareness

Ongoing training and education are essential to ensuring that staff understand their roles and responsibilities and develop their capacity to effectively address child safety and wellbeing matters.

In addition to the child safety and wellbeing induction, our staff will participate in a range of training and professional learning to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain a child safe environment.

Staff child safety and wellbeing training will be delivered at least annually and will include guidance on:

- our school's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes, and practices
- completing the Protecting Children – Mandatory Reporting and Other Legal Obligations online module annually
- procedures for responding to complaints and concerns about child abuse
- recognising indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and students
- responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who disclose harm
- how to build culturally safe environments for children and students
- information sharing and recordkeeping obligations
- how to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in the school environment without compromising a child or student's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities.

Other professional learning and training on child safety and wellbeing, for example, training for our volunteers, will be tailored to specific roles and responsibilities and any identified or emerging needs or issues.

School Board training and education

To ensure our School Board is equipped with the knowledge required to make decisions in the best interests of student safety and wellbeing, and to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in our school environment, the School Board is trained at least annually. Training includes guidance on:

- individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for implementing the Child Safe

Standards and managing the risk of child abuse
- child safety and wellbeing risks in our school environment
- Fitra Community School child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes and practices

Complaints and Reporting Processes

Fitra Community School fosters a culture that encourages staff, volunteers, students, parents, and the school community to raise concerns and complaints. This makes it more difficult for breaches of the code of conduct, misconduct or abuse to occur and remain hidden.

We have clear pathways for raising complaints and concerns and responding and this is documented in the School's Concerns and Complaints or Policy.

If there is an incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion of child abuse, all staff and volunteers (including School Board member) must follow our Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures. Our policy and procedures address complaints and concerns of child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, school staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to the school.

As soon as any immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, and relevant school staff have been informed, we will ensure our school follows:

- the Four Critical Actions for complaints and concerns relating to adult behaviour towards a child
- the Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending

Our Bullying and Harassment Policy cover complaints and concerns relating to student physical violence or other harmful behaviors.

Communications

Fitra Community School is committed to communicating our child safety strategies to the school community through:

- ensuring that key child safety and wellbeing policies are available on the Compass school management system including the Child Safety Policy (this document), Child Safety Code of Conduct, and the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedure
- updates in our various School communication mediums
- ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings, staff meetings and School Board meetings.

Privacy and Information Sharing

Fitra Community School collects, uses, and discloses information about children and their families in

accordance with Victorian privacy laws, and other relevant laws. For information on how our school collects, uses and discloses information refer to the School's Privacy Policy.

Records Management

We acknowledge that good records management practices are a critical element of child safety and wellbeing and manage our records in accordance with the School's Records Management Standard Operating Procedure.

When an allegation of child sexual abuse is made, full and accurate records must be created to document all aspects of the allegation and investigation.

Review of Child Safety Practices

At Fitra Community School, we have established processes for the review and ongoing improvement of our child safe policies, procedures, and practices.

We will:

- review and improve our policy every 2 years or after any significant child safety incident
- analyse any complaints, concerns, and safety incidents to improve policy and practice
- act with transparency and share pertinent learnings and review outcomes with school staff and our school community.

Related Documentation

FCS philosophy

The National Safe Schools Framework

Student Wellbeing Hub website: https://www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/

Related Policies

This Child Safety Policy is to be read in conjunction with other related school policies, procedures, and codes. These include, without limiting those specifically referenced in this policy our:

- Bullying and Harassment Policy Policy
- Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Managing Complaints and Grievances Policy
- Internet Policy

- Equal Opportunity and Anti-Harassment Policy
- Student Welfare Policy
- Visitor and External Provider Policy

APPENDIX 1

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Purpose

Our Child Safety Code of Conduct sets out the expected behaviour of adults with children and young people in our school.

All Fitra Community School staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers, School Board members and any other adult involved in child-connected work must follow the Child Safety Code of Conduct.

The Child Safety Code of Conduct applies to all physical and online environments used by students. It also applies during or outside of school hours and in other locations provided by the school for student use (for example, a school camp).

Acceptable Behaviours

As Fitra Community School, staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other member of our school community involved in child-connected work, we are responsible for supporting and promoting the safety of children by:

- upholding our Fitra Community School commitment to child safety at all times and adhering to our Child Safety Policy
- treating students and families in our school community with respect in our school environment and outside our school environment as part of normal social and community activities
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of students, particularly if they disclose that they or another child or student has been abused or are worried about their safety or the safety of another child or student
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal students
- being cognisant of the specific needs of students who present with characteristics that make them more at risk or vulnerable, whether that be their race, place of origin, family circumstances, identity or ability
- ensuring, as far as practicable, that adults are not alone with a student – one-to-one interactions between an adult and a student are to be in an open space or in line of sight of another adult.
- reporting any allegations of child abuse or other child safety concerns to the Principal.
- understanding and complying with all reporting and disclosure obligations (including mandatory reporting) in line with our Mandatory Reporting Policy, Other Child Safety Reporting

Obligations Policy, Reportable Conduct Policy and Processes for Responding to and Reporting Suspected Child Abuse[1] (together referred to as the ***Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures***) and the PROTECT Four Critical Actions.

- if child abuse is suspected, ensuring as quickly as possible that the student(s) are safe and protected from harm.

Unacceptable Behaviours

As Fitra Community School, staff, volunteers, contractors and member of our school community involved in child-connected work we must not:

- ignore or disregard any concerns, suspicions or disclosures of child abuse or harm
- develop a relationship with any student that could be seen as favouritism or amount to 'grooming' behaviour (for example, by offering gifts)
- display behaviours or engage with students in ways that are not justified by the educational or professional context
- ignore an adult's overly familiar or inappropriate behaviour towards a student
- discuss intimate topics or use sexualised language, except when needed to deliver the school curriculum or professional guidance
- treat a child or student unfavourably because of their disability, age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability, sexuality or ethnicity
- communicate directly with a student through personal or private contact channels (including by social media, email, instant messaging, texting etc) except where that communication is reasonable in all the circumstances, related to schoolwork or extra-curricular activities or where there is a safety concern or other urgent matter
- photograph or video a child or student except where the photograph or video is to capture legitimate school activities or where required for duty of care purposes
- consume alcohol or take illicit drugs in the school environment or at school events where students are present
- have contact with any student outside of school hours except when needed to deliver the school curriculum or professional guidance and parental or carer permission has been sought.

Breaches to Child Safety Code of Conduct

All Fitra Community School staff, volunteers, contractors and any other member of the school community involved in child-connected work who breach this Child Safety Code of Conduct may be subject to disciplinary procedures in accordance with their employment agreement or relevant industrial instrument, professional code or terms of engagement.

In instances where a reportable allegation has been made, the matter will be managed by the Principal or School Board (as appropriate in the circumstances) and may be subject to referral to Victoria Police.

All breaches and suspected breaches of the Fitra Community School Child Safety Code of Conduct must

be reported to the principal.

If the breach or suspected breach relates to the principal, contact a School Board member.

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[1] Refer Appendix 2 of Child Safety Policy

APPENDIX 2

Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse

Purpose

These procedures have been developed to ensure the wellbeing of all students and to protect them from child abuse in accordance with the School's obligation to maintain a child safe environment under Ministerial Order 1359.

Scope

All members of the School community share a responsibility to ensure the welfare of all students. These procedures extend to all School staff, whether permanent, fixed term or casual employees of the school, whether teaching or non-teaching and including volunteers or contracted service providers working at the school. It also applies to allegations or disclosures of child abuse made by a child.

Standards

In February 2022, the Victorian Deputy Premier and Minister for Education released the Ministerial Order No 1359 which outlines minimum standards for maintaining "child safe environments" for all organisations with direct and regular contact with children.

These minimum standards form a requirement for registration which requires the school to meet all of the standards of this Ministerial Order. These minimum standards will continue to enhance and promote our culture in which protecting our students from abuse is part of everyday thinking and practice within the school.

Definitions

For the purpose of ensuring a clear understanding of the relevant parts of the Ministerial Order 1359:

A **Child** means any student enrolled at the school.

Child connected work means work authorised by the school and performed by an adult in the School environment where children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

Child Abuse includes any act committed against a child involving:

- A sexual offence
- A grooming offence
- The infliction on a child of physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm or serious neglect.

Child Abuse includes but is not limited to Child Sexual Abuse.

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.

Child FIRST: The Family Information Referral Support Team run by a registered community service in a local area.

Child Protection Services: Government Authority which takes responsibility for the protection of children and to whom reports are made.

DFFH: Department of Families, Fairness & Housing

Mandatory Notifier: In the context of the school is the Principal, a VIT registered teacher, a person holding Permission to Teach from VIT or a Registered Nurse.

Mandatory Reporting: Requirement imposed on a Mandatory Notifier to report to government authorities, as required by the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic), in the event that the Mandatory Notifier forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of physical or sexual abuse in circumstances where the parents have not

protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from that harm.

Teacher: a qualified teacher with VIT registration or a person holding Permission to Teach from VIT.

Registered Nurse: a person registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to practice in the nursing and midwifery profession as a nurse.

School environment means any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the school for use by a child during or outside school hours including:

- a campus of the school
- online school environments (including email and intranet systems), and
- 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).

School staff means an individual member of staff working for the school who is:

- directly engaged or employed by the School's governing body
- a volunteer
- contracted service provider (whether or not they are employed through a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary)

Procedures

The intention of these procedures is to support School staff in ensuring a child safe environment at the School, in particular by providing guidance and procedures for School staff to appropriately respond to allegations or disclosures or concerns that they have of suspected child abuse or regarding the wellbeing of a Child.

These procedures do not displace the obligations of a Mandatory Notifier under relevant legislation. Nor do they displace the obligation placed on any adult under the Crimes Act (Vic) which requires any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 years of age to report that information to police (this includes grooming). Further information on these obligations may be found in the following policy documents:

- Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Other Child Safety Reporting Obligations Policy

What is Child Abuse?

Some examples of Child Abuse are:

- Physical injury which results from abuse or neglect
- Sexual abuse which refers to a situation in which a person uses power or authority over a child to involve the child in sexual activity, and the child's parent or caregiver has not protected the child
- Emotional abuse which involves a parent or caregiver repeatedly rejecting the child or using threats to frighten the child
- Neglect which occurs when a parent or caregiver fails to provide the child with the basic necessities of life; food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision; to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

Without in any way displacing the legal obligations imposed on the Principal by the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, Mandatory Notifiers by the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) and all adults by the Crimes Act (Vic), School staff should refer any allegations, disclosures or concerns in relation to child safety involving a child to the Principal. Concerns should be communicated promptly. Actions that may flow from this will depend on the precise circumstances. In all instances, it is expected that any reporting of a matter to external authorities will be undertaken on behalf of the school by the Principal, unless specifically delegated by the Principal to another member of staff.

The Principal will (unless specifically delegated to an alternate member of staff) respond to the the allegation, disclosure or concern by:

- Reporting the matter to the Police: If it is believed that the child's safety is in immediate risk the circumstance will be immediately reported to the Police.
- Contacting Child Protective Services and/or to Child FIRST. This would apply when the person reporting has significant concern for a child's wellbeing, but does not believe that the child needs immediate protection.
- Contacting the Parent/Guardian of the child.
- Enacting the school's Critical Incident Plan (e.g. if an allegation is made against a

current member of staff). This will be done by the Principal, if appropriate.

- Taking steps to remove the source of concern (e.g. standing down a member of School Staff or student, restricting access to the school of a volunteer or contractor), consistent with appropriate legal advice.
- Taking all necessary steps to ensure that the child or children who make or is affected by an allegation of child abuse, has a safe School environment and is given appropriate support by the school. Ensuring that any response by the school will also take into account the needs of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disabilities and children who are vulnerable. Refer to the Dealing with Diversity section below.
- An investigation – to be carried out by the Principal or his/her nominee, subject to the requirements of any government authority. The school will act appropriately on the findings of any investigation. Where child abuse has resulted from the actions of a member of School Staff, this may include disciplinary action against that person.
- A review – the school will conduct a review of its actions in relation to any instance of child abuse and will incorporate any modifications / learnings into these procedures, as may be deemed necessary.

In the event that the Principal is unable to respond to the suspected child abuse as noted above, and is unable to delegate the responsibility for responding to the suspected child abuse to an alternative member of staff, the person making or receiving the allegation or disclosure should contact the school Board, who will then assign an appropriate person to respond to the suspected child abuse in accordance with the above.

In all cases, the school will also act in accordance with its legal obligations which may involve reporting the matter to appropriate authorities including:

- Victoria Police
- Department of Families, Fairness & Housing
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

In certain circumstances, this may result in the matter (including investigation) being taken over by the relevant authority.

The possible outcomes will depend on the nature of the complaint and allegations. Where an investigation has found that a complaint of child abuse is substantiated, appropriate action will be taken by the school against the person found to be the perpetrator. For employees, this may include a range of sanctions including termination of employment. For students, this may include expulsion from

the school.

Dealing with Diversity

The school is aware that some people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds may face barriers in reporting allegations of abuse. For example, people from some cultures may experience anxiety when talking with police, and communicating in English may be a barrier for some. We understand the need to be sensitive to these issues and meet people's needs where possible, such as having an interpreter present (who could be a friend or family member).

If an allegation of abuse involves an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, we will ensure a culturally appropriate response. A way to help ensure this could include engaging with parents/guardians of Aboriginal children, local Aboriginal communities or an Aboriginal community controlled organisations to review policies and procedures.

Some children with a disability may experience barriers disclosing an incident. For example, children with hearing or cognitive impairments may need support to help them explain the incident, including through sign language interpreters. Advice on communicating with people with a disability can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services website: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/communityinvolvement/people-with-a-disability-in-the-community/communicate-and-consult-with-people-with-adisability/communication-with-people-with-disabilities .

Documentation

It is important that all concerns and observations are documented in a confidential file and that notes and records are accurate and contemporaneous. It is also important to record all actions taken. This process of documentation may occur over a period of time. Documentation and records must be stored in a secure location in the staff office to protect the privacy of all parties involved.

The Principal (or their delegate) is responsible for ensuring that appropriate records are made and kept confidential. However, it is the expectation that all School staff members involved in an incident make their own contemporaneous records provide them for filing.

Information about child abuse must remain confidential and the School staff member making the report must not discuss this information with anyone other than the Principal (or their delegate), Police, Child Protection Services and/or Child First representative.

It is noted that a Mandatory Notifier acting in good faith under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 or an adult acting in good faith under Crimes Act (Vic) has certain protections as to privilege and confidentiality.

Applicable Legislation

The legislation relevant to this Policy includes:

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
- Crimes Act Amendment (Protection of Children) 2014
- Working with Children Act 2005
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005

Related Policies and Documents

- Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Other Child Safety Reporting Obligations Policy
- Reportable Conduct Policy
- "Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people: a joint protocol of the Department of Human Services Child Protection, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Licensed Children's Services and Victorian Schools" (May 2010) www.dhhs.vic.gov.au.
- Standard Operating Procedure - Records Management