

# Child Safety Policy

August 2019



## Context

As a Catholic school and a Ministry of Mercy Education Ltd, OLMC has a mission-driven, moral and legal responsibility to build and nurture child-safe school environments and to take every precaution to protect all children and young people from all forms of harm and abuse.

Our Mission, Vision and Values statement attests to our commitment to nurturing a school environment where students are respected, their voices are heard and they feel safe. This policy gives expression to these commitments and to the College's steadfast resolve to provide a safe and secure environment for students.

## Purpose and Scope

This policy supports OLMC's commitment to a strong and sustainable child safety culture. It outlines OLMC's policy commitments, structures, systems and procedures for keeping students safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our school environment, on campus, online and in other locations where College activities occur.

This policy takes into account relevant legislative requirements within the state of Victoria, including the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 870.

This policy applies to school staff, including school employees, volunteers, contractors, clergy and College Council members.

## Principles

- All children and young people, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or social background, have the right to personal safety, including safety in relationships and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- OLMC is committed to nurturing a culturally safe and inclusive community which celebrates diversity and difference and which protects the right of each student to feel safe and be safe at school.
- OLMC is committed to working in partnership with families and community agencies to reduce or remove risks to the personal safety and wellbeing of students.
- All students have the right to a thorough and systematic education in all aspects of personal safety, in partnership with their parents/guardians/caregivers.
- All adults in our College, including teaching and non-teaching staff, clergy, volunteers, contractors and College Council members, have a responsibility to care for students, to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.

- OLMC's policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of students are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and young people. They also demonstrate compliance with legislative requirements and cooperation with the Church, governments, the police and human services agencies.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- Staff, clergy, volunteers, contractors, College Council members, parents and students should feel free to raise concerns about student safety, knowing these will be taken seriously by the College Leadership Team, or a member thereof. 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.

## Definitions

**Child.** A child or a young person who is under the age of 18

**Young person.** A person who is 12-18 years of age

**Child safety.** Encompasses matters related to protecting all children from abuse, managing the risk of abuse, providing support to a child at risk of abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of abuse.

**Child abuse.** This includes any act committed against a child involving:

- a sexual offence
- grooming
- physical violence
- serious emotional or psychological harm
- serious neglect.

**Sexual offence.** Occurs when a person involves a child in sexual activity, or deliberately puts the child in the presence of sexual behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate to the child's age and development. Sexual abuse can involve a wide range of sexual activity and may include fondling, masturbation, oral sex, penetration, voyeurism and exhibitionism. It can also include exploitation through pornography or prostitution.

**Grooming.** Refers to predatory conduct undertaken by an adult (18 years or over) to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time.

**Physical violence.** Occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from a non-accidental injury or injuries inflicted by another person. Physical violence can be inflicted in many ways, including beating, shaking, burning or using weapons (such as belts and paddles).

**Serious emotional or psychological abuse.** Occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats or the witnessing of family violence. It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and put-downs, or persistent coldness from a person, to the extent where the behaviour of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired. Serious emotional or psychological harm can also result from conduct that exploits a child, such as encouraging a child to engage in inappropriate or risky behaviours.

**Serious neglect.** A failure to provide a child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision to the extent that the health and physical development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk.

**School environment.** Any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the school for use by a child or young person during or outside school hours, including:

- a campus of the school
- online school environments
- locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, and other events.

### **School staff**

School staff means an individual working in a school environment who is:

- (a) directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority
- (b) a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary)
- (c) a minister of religion.

## **Policy Commitments**

### **Our commitment to students**

- (a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all students enrolled at OLMC.
- (b) We commit to providing students with positive and nurturing experiences.
- (c) We commit to listening to students and empowering them by taking their views seriously, and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- (d) We commit to taking action to ensure that students are protected from abuse or harm.
- (e) We commit to teaching students the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- (f) We commit to seeking input and feedback from students regarding the creation of a safe school environment.

### **Our commitment to parents and carers**

- (a) We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their daughter(s).
- (b) We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our child-safety policies and procedures.
- (c) We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of our students.
- (d) We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of students and families and being sensitive to how this may impact on student safety issues.
- (e) We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect students from abuse.

### **Our commitment to school staff**

*(inclusive of school employees, volunteers, contractors, clergy and College Council members)*

- (a) We commit to providing staff with regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to safety and wellbeing. This will include annual training in the principles and intent of this policy and our Child Safety Code of Conduct, along with staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- (b) We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by staff about keeping students safe from harm.
- (c) We commit to providing opportunities for staff to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a student.

## Our Responsibilities

Everyone employed or volunteering at OLMC 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 students are at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

### **The College Leadership Team will:**

- create an environment for students to be safe and to feel safe;
- uphold high principles and standards for all staff, clergy, volunteers, contractors and Council members;
- promote models of behaviour between adults and students based on mutual respect and consideration;
- ensure thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff;
- ensure that school personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters;
- provide regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to student protection and wellbeing;
- ensure the College meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 870;
- ensure the school takes specific action to protect children from abuse in line with the 2018 revised DET guidelines, *PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools*.

### **Staff (employees, volunteers, contractors, clergy and Council members) will:**

- treat students with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, providing a duty of care and protecting students in their care;
- follow OLMC's Child Protection Reporting Obligations Policy in the course of their work, if they form a reasonable belief that a student has been or is being abused or neglected;
- undertake regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of students;
- assist students to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse;
- uphold the College's Child Safety Code of Conduct.

## Organisational Arrangements

### **Child Safety Code of Conduct**

All staff are familiar with and are regularly reminded of the important role they play in the protection of students. They are expected to uphold the *OLMC Child Safety Code of Conduct* and the *Mercy Education Ltd & OLMC Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers*.

### **Student safety and participation**

At OLMC, we actively encourage all students to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them. We teach students about what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report on child safety. We listen to and act on any concerns students, or the concerns that parents or carers, raise with us.

### **Reporting and responding**

OLMC's *Child Protection Reporting Obligations Policy* was updated in June 2019. It presents information about the types of abuse and indicators of harm that ought to give rise to a report and it clarifies the changing legislative context that requires differing reporting requirements for varied circumstances. It also outlines procedures to be

followed by staff in reporting suspected or known concerns to the appropriate authorities.

Our complaints and disclosure processes are also outlined in the other College policies:

- *OLMC Complaints Resolutions Policy*
- *Mercy Education Ltd & OLMC Privacy Policy.*

### **Screening and recruitment of staff**

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers and involved in student-connected work, OLMC makes all reasonable efforts to:

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

The College has processes for monitoring and assessing the continuing suitability of school staff to work with students, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks and staff professional registration requirements such as Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration.

### **Child safety – education and training for staff**

At OLMC we provide staff with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters. This process begins at the induction of new employees and is continued through ongoing training and at staff briefings.

Training and staff briefings seek to ensure that everyone understands their professional, legal and moral responsibilities, including:

- building their knowledge and understanding of child abuse and child safety risks;
- staying abreast of and meeting legislative requirements to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people;
- maintaining familiarity and compliance with OLMC's internal policies;
- continuously reviewing and improving systems and practices to protect children and young people from abuse;
- taking prompt action when allegations of abuse are raised and ensuring that they are appropriately referred and investigated.

Training also includes an annual online training session, via Mercy Education Ltd, about child safety legislation and staff members' reporting obligations.

### **Risk management**

The College recognises the importance of maintaining an appropriate risk management culture and of applying logical and systematic risk management processes to all College activities, functions and operations, inclusive of child safety.

A consultative approach is used to ensure that all possible child safety risks are clearly identified and effectively managed. The College leadership Team is responsible for ensuring that an effective communication and consultation process occurs and that:

- risk management systems and procedures are consistently monitored and reviewed;
- changes are made as new risks arise and/or in response to effectiveness ratings;
- staff and volunteers contribute to risk management discussions, assessments and action plans.

## Relevant Legislation

- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.)
- *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.)
- *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.)
- *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic.)
- *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic.).
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic.) which introduced the seven Victorian Child Safe Standards
- Ministerial Order No. 870: *Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools*, made under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

## Breach of Policy

Where an **employee** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, OLMC may start the process under clause 13 of the *Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2018* (VCEMEA) for managing employment concerns. This may result in disciplinary consequences. In certain contexts, a referral of the breach to Victoria Police, DHHS Child Protection and/or the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) may be required.

Where the **Principal** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the concerned party is advised to contact Mercy Education Ltd.

Where any **other member of the College community** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the College will take appropriate action in accordance with the College policies listed below.

## Review of this Child Safety Policy

At OLMC we are committed to continuous improvement of our student safety systems and practices. We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is effective. It will be updated to accommodate changes in legislation or circumstance and we will maintain a history of updates to the policy.

## Related Policies

### OLMC College Policies

- Child Protection Reporting Obligations
- Safeguarding Children and Young People Code of Conduct
- Mercy Education Ltd & OLMC Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers
- Counselling Services Policy
- Mercy Education Ltd & OLMC Privacy Policy
- Student Acceptable Use of Digital Technologies, Devices and Social Media Policy
- Student Anti Bullying Policy
- Student Behaviour Management Policy
- Student Wellbeing Policy
- Interstate and Overseas Excursions Policy
- Staff Responsible Use of Social Media Policy
- Visitors on Campus Policy

### Catholic Education Melbourne Policies

- Policy 2.19: Child Protection – Reporting Obligations
- CECV Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

## Government Resources

Department of Education 2018, PROTECT: *Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools.*

State of Victoria 2016, *Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools: Ministerial Order No. 870*, Education & Training Reform Act 2006, Victorian Government Gazette No. S2.

**Revised:** August 2019  
**Approval Authority:** College Leadership Team  
**Person Responsible:** Head of Student Wellbeing  
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