



# Student Protection Policy

## Mater Christi College

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## 1. Introduction

At Mater Christi College, we hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of our school. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent in the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel ([CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: that is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school (Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, n. 9).

Mater Christi College is one of ten Good Samaritan Education schools, established by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan in the Benedictine tradition. We believe that all students have the right to a safe and non-threatening learning environment. In the school environment, students are respected, treated with consideration at all times and their voices are heard. In his Rule, St Benedict urges us to 'listen with the ear of heart', and place the welfare of others above our own.

Staff at Mater Christi College understand their duty of care to students. They are committed to ensuring that every student is respected and nurtured in a safe environment. This is particularly so for students who are considered more vulnerable including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and students with a disability.

## 2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of Mater Christi College to the care, safety and wellbeing of all students at our school. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep students safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our school environment, on campus, online and in other locations provided by the school.

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 and clergy.

## 3. Principles

Catholic schools have a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe ([CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

**The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety at Mater Christi College:**

- All students deserve, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- Our school works in partnership with families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and protection.

- 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 school, including teaching and non-teaching staff, clergy, volunteers, and contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- The 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 children and young people.
- Policies and practices 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, 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.

#### 4. Definitions used in this Policy

**Child:** A child or a young person enrolled as a student at the school, referred in our policy as student.

**Child abuse** includes:

- (a) any act committed against a child involving:
  - (i) a sexual offence
  - (ii) an offence under section 49B(2) of the **Crimes Act 1958** (grooming)
- (b) the infliction, on a child, of:
  - (i) physical violence
  - (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm
- (c) serious neglect of a child. ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

**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. ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

**Child neglect:** The failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Child physical abuse:** Generally, child physical abuse refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviours include shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning. The fabrication or induction of an illness by a parent or carer (previously known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy) is also considered physically abusive behaviour. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Child protection:** Statutory services designed to protect children/students who are at risk of serious harm. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Child sexual abuse:** Any sexual activity between a child under the age of consent (16) and an adult or older person (i.e. a person five or more years older than the victim) is child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse can also be:

- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult in a position of power or authority over them (e.g. a teacher); the age of consent laws do not apply in such instances due to the strong imbalance of power that exists between young people and authority figures, as well as the breaching of both personal and public trust that occurs when professional boundaries are violated
- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult family member, regardless of issues of consent, equality or coercion
- sexual activity between peers that is non-consensual or involves the use of power or coercion
- non-consensual sexual activity between minors (e.g. a 14-year-old and an 11-year-old), or any sexual behaviour between a child and another child or adolescent who, due to their age or stage of development, is in a position of power, trust or responsibility over the victim. Sexual activity between adolescents at a similar developmental level is not considered abuse. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Mandatory Reporting:** The legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect is known as mandatory reporting. Mandated persons include teachers, nurses, police, psychologists, psychiatrists and medical practitioners. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Reasonable Belief:** When staff are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person, they must assess that concern to determine if a report should be made to the relevant agency. This process of considering all relevant information and observations is known as forming a 'reasonable belief'. A 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

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

- (a) a campus of the school
- (b) online school environments (including email and intranet systems)
- (c) 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). ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))
- (d) work experience (Ministerial Order 382), structured workplace learning (Ministerial Order 55) and school-based apprenticeships
- (e) volunteer arrangements
- (f) external providers of external secondary programs

**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. ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

## 5. Policy Commitments

All students enrolled at Mater Christi College have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety. There is particular attention paid to the most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability.

### **Our commitment to our students**

- (a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people enrolled in our school.
- (b) We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- (c) We commit to listening to children and young people 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 children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- (e) We commit to teaching children and young people 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 children.
- (b) We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our child-safety practice, policies and procedures.
- (c) We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- (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 children from abuse.

### **Our commitment to our school staff (school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy)**

- (a) We commit to providing all Mater Christi College staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.
- (b) We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and young people's protection and wellbeing. This will include annual training in the principles and intent of the Child Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- (c) We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by Mater Christi College staff, clergy, volunteers, and contractors about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- (d) We commit to providing opportunities for Mater Christi College school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young person.

## 6. Responsibilities and Organisational Arrangements

Everyone employed or volunteering at Mater Christi College 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 is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make. ([CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#))

The school has allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety as follows:

Head of Senior School, Head of Middle School and International Coordinator are appointed as Student Protection Leaders. This team will work with the College Principal to implement student protection procedures, to provide training for staff and to ensure a safe learning environment for all students.

All College Positions of Leadership will include a responsibility to implement, support and drive measures which promote student safety.

All teachers and staff will be provided with regular training opportunities and will be required to annually acknowledge their awareness of and commitment to Mater Christi College Student Protection policy, code of conduct and procedures.

### 6.1 Guide to Responsibilities of School Leadership

The principal, the school governing authority and school leaders at Mater Christi College recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of and shared responsibility for child safety. Responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff, clergy, volunteers, and contractors
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration
- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff
- ensuring that school personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to child and young people's protection and wellbeing
- ensuring the school meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in [Ministerial Order No. 870](#).

### 6.2 Guide to Responsibilities of School Staff

Responsibilities of school staff (school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy) include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, providing a duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care

- following the legislative and internal 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
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured
- undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of children and young people
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse
- following the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct.

### 6.3 Organisational Arrangements

All staff will be required to read and sign their commitment to adhere to child safety policy and code of conduct.

Staff, visitors, volunteers and contractors will be provided with access to relevant resources to understand their responsibilities, to identify the College's commitment to zero tolerance of child abuse and to ensure that appropriate action is taken as demanded by the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 870.

All students will be informed of process for reporting at all times if they feel unsafe, abused, neglected or in danger. Students will be encouraged to report to their Pastoral or Subject teacher who upon forming a reasonable belief that the student is being abused, neglected or in danger, will make a report. It is recommended that where possible, teachers work with Heads of School or other College leaders.

Once a report has been made to any adult within the College and a reasonable believe has been formed that a child is unsafe, abused, neglected or in danger, he/she will report this matter to the police and ensure that College Principal or one of Student Protection Leaders are informed.

Once a report has been made to the police, the College leaders will ensure that appropriate follow up action has been taken. The report will remain an open matter until a formal report of closure is submitted to Principal, Heads of School or International Student Coordinator. Reports will include a risk management assessment and future evaluation strategy with improvements being ratified by either College Executive Team or College Board and all members of the Community subsequently informed.

All reports will be filed, with action and outcome notes in an appropriately confidential folder.

Student Protection Leaders:

Head of Senior School, Head of Middle School and International Student Coordinator are the appointed Student Protection Leaders. Training will be provided for these College leaders and their roles will be adjusted to include child safety responsibility.



Communication:

All students will be made aware of their role via the Student Bulletin

Parents will be informed via the College Website – eNews bulletin

Staff will be informed at Staff Briefing, and at Staff Seminar on August 10.

All announcements will include an outline of the responsibilities of the three Student Protection Leader and how reports can be made to them.

## 7. Expectation of College Staff – Student Protection Code of Conduct

At Mater Christi College, we expect school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy to proactively ensure the safety of students at all times and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety of any child at the school. All school staff must remain familiar with the relevant laws, the code of conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to child protection and to comply with all requirements. We have developed a Student Protection (Child Safety) Code of Conduct which recognises the critical role that school staff play in protecting the students in our care and establishes clear expectations of school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and or neglect.

Our Code also protects school staff through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

## 8. Student Safety and Participation

At Mater Christi College, 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 their parents or carers, raise with us.

## 9. Reporting and Responding

Our school records any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Student Protection Code of Conduct, and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements. 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.) and the recommendations of the [Betrayal of Trust](#) report.

Child protection reporting obligations fall under separate pieces of legislation with differing reporting requirements.

Our school's **Child Protection – 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.

Our policy assists staff, volunteers and families 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
- comply with mandatory reporting obligations under child protection law and their legal obligations relating to criminal child abuse and grooming under criminal law.

Our school has also established internal processes to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a student.

### **Procedure**

Should a student have a complaint or appeal, the following steps are to be followed:

1. The student or parent should put the following information relating to the complaint or appeal in writing:
  - description of the complaint or appeal;
  - state whether they wish to formally present their case;
  - steps they have taken to deal with the problem;
  - what they would like to happen to fix the problem and prevent it from happening again.
2. The student or parent brings the complaint or appeal to the attention of the student's Pastoral or subject teacher. The College contact will acknowledge receipt of complaint and finalise in a timely manner.
3. If the complaint or appeal is not dealt with to the student or parent's satisfaction, they may bring it to the attention of the Year Learning Coordinator. The Year Learning Coordinator will either deal with the issue or arrange for it to be dealt with by a leadership representative. The first two steps should be completed in a timely way.
4. If the issue remains unresolved, the Principal will take appropriate steps to mediate and resolve the situation.
5. Should the issue still not be resolved to the student's satisfaction, Mater Christi College will make arrangements for an independent external person to resolve the issue. The student will be given the opportunity to formally present his or her case. The external contact may be a representative from Victorian Mediation Centre.
6. All parties involved should receive a written statement of the outcomes including reasons for the decision.
7. All documentation relating to complaints or appeals should be archived with the student file (with Registrar) for audit purposes.

### **Related Policies, Procedures and Guidelines:**

Personal Protection and Respect Guidelines and Procedures  
 College Expectations and Pastoral Care Guidelines (Student Handbook)  
 Student Management Processes (Student Handbook)  
 Privacy Policy  
 Mandatory Reporting Guidelines  
 The Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct

## 10. Screening and Recruitment of School Staff

Mater Christi College will apply thorough and rigorous screening processes in the recruitment of employees and volunteers involved in child-connected work. Our commitment to child safety and our screening requirements are included in all advertisements for such employee, contractor and volunteer positions, and all applicants are provided with copies of the school's Student Protection Policy and Code of Conduct.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work, we make 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
- obtain references that address the applicant's suitability for the job and working with children.

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

## 11. Student Protection – Education and Training for School Staff

Mater Christi College provides employees, volunteers and clergy with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address student protection 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.

Induction Program: An outline of Student Protection procedures, policy and staff code of conduct will be added to Handbook for New Staff and included in the first meeting with staff. New staff will be required to register their awareness and commitment to Student Protection policy, code of conduct and procedures.

Student Protection policy, code of conduct and procedures will be included annually in staff professional learning and training program. Staff will register their awareness and commitment annually to Student Safety policies, code of conduct and procedures.

## 12. Risk Management

At Mater Christi College we are committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to student safety across our whole school environment, and reducing or eliminating (where possible) all potential sources of harm. We document, implement, monitor and periodically review our risk management strategies for child safety and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

Student Protection Leaders will report regularly at College Executive Team, thereby identifying risk areas and promoting improvement strategies for Student Protection policies, code of conduct and procedures.

The College Compliance and Governance Committee will include student safety in its risk management matrix so that the Board is regularly informed of developments, levels of risk and strategies being implemented by the College to mitigate risk levels.

Where appropriate, the Board will require the Principal to implement appropriate improvements.

## 13. Relevant Legislation

- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.)
- *Working with Children Act 2005* (Vic.)
- *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic.)
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) – Three new criminal offences have been introduced under this Act:
  - a) **Failure to disclose offence:** Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.
  - b) **Failure to protect offence:** The offence will apply 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.
  - i) **Grooming offence:** This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child. Grooming can be conducted in person or online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails.

## 14. Related Policies

### 14.1 Catholic Education Melbourne Policies

- [Policy 2.2: Guidelines Relating to the Employment of Staff](#) (currently under review)
- [Policy 2.19: Child Protection – Reporting Obligations](#)
- [Policy 2.19a: School Guidelines –Police and DHHS Interview Protocols](#)
- Policy 2.20: Misconduct Policy (withdrawn and currently under review)
- [Policy 2.26: Pastoral Care of Students in Catholic Schools](#)(currently under review)

## 15. Breach of Policy

Where an **employee** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this Policy, Mater Christi College may start the process under clause 13 of the *Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013* (VCEMEA) for managing employment concerns. This may result in disciplinary consequences.

Where the **principal** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the concerned party is advised to contact the parish priest or the employer. Relevant notification should also be made to Catholic Education Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics and Investigation).

Where any **other member of the school community** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the school is to take appropriate action, and/or contact Catholic Education Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics and Investigation).

## 16. Review of this Student Protection Policy

At Mater Christi College we are committed to continuous improvement of our child safety systems and practices. We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is working in practice and updated to accommodate changes in legislation or circumstance.

We will maintain a history of updates to the policy.

### History of Updates to Policy

Date	Comment (e.g. major review, minor review)
August 2016	First Version
February 2017	Definitions-School Environment (d) added

## 17. 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.\*](#)

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2013, [\*Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013\*](#), CECV.

Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, [\*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium\*](#), Vatican.

Safe Schools Hub 2014, [\*National Safe Schools Framework Glossary\*](#), Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

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.

Victorian Government Department of Justice 2016, [\*Betrayal of Trust Implementation\*](#).