



## CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING POLICY

The Academy of Mary Immaculate (the college) is a school which operates with the consent of the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne and is owned, operated and governed by Mercy Education Limited.

At the College, we hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of our college. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent to the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel.

The person of each individual human being, in their material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic college in the Mercy Tradition.

### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of the college to the care, safety and wellbeing of all students at our school. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures, actions and strategies that will be implemented to ensure that a child safe culture is championed and modelled at all levels of the school, 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 Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 1359.

This policy applies to college staff, including college employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy. It should be read in conjunction with the following related school policies and procedures:

1. Identifying and Responding to Abuse – Reporting obligations
2. Child Safety Code of Conduct
3. Reportable Conduct Policy.

Catholic colleges have a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing 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 and wellbeing at [School name]:

- All students deserve, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- Our college 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 wellbeing 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/carers.
- All adults in our college, 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, to identify and mitigate risks related to child safety and wellbeing in the school environment 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.
- All members of the college community (including students and their families) are kept informed of child safety and wellbeing matters (where appropriate) and are involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
- Staff, clergy, volunteers, contractors, parents and students should feel free to raise concerns about child safety and wellbeing, 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 (including under legislated information sharing schemes being Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) or Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)) or pastorally.

## Definitions

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

**Child abuse** includes:

1. any act committed against a child involving:
  - a. a sexual offence
  - b. an offence under section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming)
2. the infliction, on a child, of:
  - a. physical violence
  - b. serious emotional or psychological harm
3. serious neglect of a child.

**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 suspicions, incidents, disclosures or allegations of child abuse (Ministerial Order No. 1359).

**Child neglect** includes a failure to provide the 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 (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

**Child physical** abuse generally consists of any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

**Child sexual abuse** is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity. It can include a wide range of sexual activity and does not always involve physical contact or force (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

**Emotional child abuse** occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats, or by witnessing family violence (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

**Grooming** is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later date. It can include communication and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

**Mandatory reporting:** The legal requirement under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.) to protect children from harm relating to physical and sexual abuse. The Principal, registered teachers and early childhood teachers, school counsellors, religious clergy, medical practitioners and nurses at a school are mandatory reporters under this Act (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

**Reasonable belief – mandatory reporting:** When college 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

**Reasonable belief – reportable conduct scheme:** When a person has a reasonable belief that a worker/volunteer has committed reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct. A reasonable belief is more than suspicion and there must be some objective basis for the belief. It does not necessitate proof or require certainty.

NOTE: the difference between the reasonable belief definitions under mandatory reporting and the reportable conduct scheme is the category of persons who are required to, or can, form the reasonable belief which forms the basis for a report.

**Reportable conduct:** Five types of reportable conduct are listed in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic.) (as amended by the Children Legislation Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2017). These include:

1. sexual offences (against, with or in the presence of a child)
2. sexual misconduct (against, with or in the presence of a child)
3. physical violence (against, with or in the presence of a child)
4. behaviour that is likely to cause significant emotional or psychological harm
5. significant neglect.

**School/College environment** means any of the following physical, online or virtual places used during or outside school hours:

- a campus of the college
- online or virtual school environments made available or authorized by the college for use by a child or student (including email, intranet systems, software, applications, collaboration tools and online services)
- other locations provided by the school or through a third-part provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for school camps, approved homestay accommodation, delivery of education and training, sporting events, excursions, competitions and other events) (Ministerial Order No. 1359).

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

- directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority
- a contracted service provider engaged by MACS (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary) engaged to perform child-related work for [School name]
- a minister of religion, a religious leader or an employee or officer of a religious body associated with MACS (Ministerial Order No. 1359).

**Volunteer** means a person who performs work without remuneration or reward for the college in the college environment.

## Policy commitments

All students enrolled at the college have the right to feel safe and be safe. The safety and 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 (as a school community we acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal culture and it's importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children), children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with a disability, children who are unable to live at home, international students, and LGBTIQ+ students.

### Our commitment to our students

- We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people enrolled in our college.
- We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- We commit to listening to children and young people, and empowering them by ensuring that they understand their rights (including to safety, information and participation), and by taking their views seriously and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- We commit to ensuring that a student's ability to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights is encouraged and actively supported. We commit to taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- We commit to ensuring that the needs of all children and young people enrolled in our college are met, including those who are most vulnerable.
- We commit to recognising the importance of friendships and to encouraging support from peers, to help children and students feel safe and less isolated.
- We commit to developing a culture that facilitates and provides opportunities for children and student participation, and that strengthens the confidence and engagement of children and students by being responsive to their input.
- We commit to ensure that we have measures in place to ensure any form of racism is identified, confronted and not tolerated.
- We commit to deal with any instances of racism with the appropriate consequences.
- We commit to teaching children and young people the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- We commit to seeking input and feedback from students regarding the creation of a safe school environment.
- We commit to support the full and active participation and inclusion of Aboriginal children in all activities.

### Our commitment to parents, guardians and carers

- We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents, guardians and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.
- We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents, guardians and carers about our child safety and wellbeing practice, policies and procedures.
- We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents, guardians and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- We commit to open engagement and communication with parents, guardians and carers about our child safe approach and our operations and governance related to child safety and wellbeing.
- We commit to ensuring that relevant information relating to child safety and wellbeing is accessible to parents, guardians and carers.
- We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of students and families, and being sensitive to how this may impact on student safety issues.
- We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

- We commit to support the full and active participation and inclusion of Aboriginal families of our students in all activities

Our commitment to our college staff (college employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy)

- We commit to providing all college staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles, and to ensure that staff are attuned to signs of harm and are able to facilitate child-friendly ways for children and students to express their views, participate in decision-making and raise their concerns. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.
- We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and wellbeing, and young people's protection and wellbeing. This will include annual training in the principles and intent of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and MEL Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by the college staff, clergy, volunteers and contractors about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- We commit to providing opportunities for college employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young person.

## **Responsibilities and organisational arrangements**

Everyone employed or volunteering at the college has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play individually and collectively to ensure a child safe culture in which the wellbeing and safety of all students is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make

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

- School Principal
- Deputy Principal Wellbeing and Operations
- Student Counsellor

The above mentioned are also the college's Senior Child Safe Officer's and in turn are supported by the Student Wellbeing Leaders who also undertake the role of Child Safe Officers.

Guide to responsibilities of college leadership

The Principal, the college governing authority and college leaders 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 and wellbeing. 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 and volunteers
- ensuring that college personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to prevent, identify and address child safety and wellbeing matters
- ensuring that the college has in place appropriate risk management strategies and practices that focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks related to child safety and wellbeing in the school environment
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to children and young people's protection and wellbeing
- ensuring the college meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 1359

- ensuring the college takes specific action to protect children from abuse in line with the three new criminal offences introduced under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) and in line with PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools
- ensuring the college understands and reports all matters that may constitute reportable conduct under the Reportable Conduct Scheme and in accordance with the college's reportable conduct policy
- sharing information under legislated information sharing schemes (CISS and FVISS) in accordance with the college's prescribed role as an ISE
- ensuring that the college monitors and reviews the risks related to child safety and wellbeing, including evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of its risk controls, on an annual basis.

#### Guide to responsibilities of school staff

Responsibilities of college staff (college employees, contractors and clergy) and volunteers 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 college policies, procedures and 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, including ways to prevent, identify and mitigate risks relating to child safety and wellbeing, 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 College's Code of Conduct
- where risks of child abuse are identified, ensuring that action is taken to mitigate against those risks and that risks and actions are appropriately recorded.

#### Organisational arrangements

The Principal has the overall leadership role in monitoring and responding to the policy, procedures and practices for child safety and wellbeing at the college in accordance with this Policy.

We have appointed a Deputy Principal – Wellbeing and Operations and the role description is available in the college's intranet:

- The DP – Wellbeing and Operations, alongside the Child Safety and Wellbeing Team, assists the Principal.
- The DP – Wellbeing and Operations, alongside the Child Safety and Wellbeing Team works in preventing, identifying and mitigating risks in child safety and wellbeing.
- The DP – Wellbeing and Operations, alongside the Child Safety and Wellbeing Team also supports the Principal to monitor implementation of college policies, procedures and practices, to monitor and review the risks associated with child safety and wellbeing (including by and to identify professional learning.

The College's website and newsletter will provide information to keep parents and carers informed of child safety and wellbeing commitments, procedures and arrangements.

### **Expectation of our school staff and volunteers – MEL Code of Conduct**

At the college, we expect college employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy to proactively ensure the safety and wellbeing of students at all times, to identify concerns about child safety and wellbeing and to

take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing 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 comply with all requirements. We have developed a Code of Conduct, which recognises the critical role that college staff play in protecting the students in our care and establishes clear expectations of college employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and/or neglect.

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

### **Student safety and participation**

At the 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 their concerns. We listen to and act on any concerns students, or their parents or carers, raise with us.

The curriculum design integrates appropriate knowledge and skills to enhance students' understanding of being safe, as well as their understanding of their rights to safety, information and participation. Teaching and learning strategies that acknowledge and support student agency and voice are implemented. We ensure that students are offered access to sexual abuse prevention programs and to relevant related information in an age-appropriate way.

We have developed appropriate education about:

- standards of behaviour for students attending our college
- healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality)
- resilience
- child abuse awareness and prevention.

We have also developed curriculum planning documents that detail the strategies and actions the school takes to implement its obligations to ensure that:

- children and students are informed about all of their rights, including to safety, information and participation
- the importance of friendship is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, to help children and students feel safe and be less isolated
- staff and volunteers are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for children and students to express their views, participate in decision-making and raise their concerns
- we have strategies in place to develop a culture that facilitates participation and is responsive to the input of children and students
- we provide opportunities for children and students to participate and is responsive to their contributions to strengthen confidence and engagement
- students are offered access to sexual abuse prevention programs and to relevant information in an age-appropriate way.

### **Reporting and responding**

Our college creates records relevant to any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the MEL Code of Conduct, and maintains and disposes of those records in accordance with security and privacy requirements and Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards (including minimum retention periods). 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.), the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (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 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 under the reportable conduct scheme as well as mandatory reporting
- 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 child abuse and grooming under criminal law
- understand and comply with information sharing and recordkeeping obligations
- comply with reporting obligations under the reportable conduct scheme including obligations to report and investigate allegations of reportable conduct.

Our college has also established additional internal procedures and processes to help ensure that appropriate action is taken to prevent, identify and respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a student.

Our college is a prescribed Information Sharing Entity (ISE) meaning that, where legislated requirements are met, it is able to share confidential information with other ISEs to promote child wellbeing or safety under the CISS or FVISS.

At the academy, if any member of our community has concerns for a child's safety they need to discuss, they can notify the school Principal, the Deputy Principal or the College Counsellor.

If these people are not available, then it should be discussed with a member of the collegel leadership team. Alternatively, any member of the school community may report directly to the responsible authority.

The staff member, supported by the Principal or by a designated person will follow the step-by-step guide to making a report as outlined in the Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse.

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

The 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 wellbeing 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 MEL Code of Conduct and the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Each job description for staff involved in child-connected work has a clear statement that sets out the requirements, duties and responsibilities regarding child safety and wellbeing for those in that role and the occupant's essential qualifications, experience and attributes in relation to child safety and wellbeing.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work, we ensure that we gather, verify and record the following information about any person we propose to engage:

- 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 essential or relevant 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 will also ensure that appropriate supervision or support arrangements are in place in relation to the induction of new school staff into the school's policies, codes, practices and procedures governing child safety and wellbeing and child-connected work.

We have procedures and processes for monitoring and assessing the continuing suitability of school staff and volunteers 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.

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

The college provides employees, volunteers and clergy with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety and wellbeing 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.

At least annually, our professional learning and training addresses:

- staff's individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse
- preventing, identifying and mitigating child abuse risks in the school environment without compromising a child or student's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities
- the reportable conduct scheme
- our college's current child safety standards (including this Policy, the MEL Code of Conduct and any other policies and procedures relating to child safety and wellbeing, including in relation to managing complaints and concerns related to child abuse)
- guidance on recognizing indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and students
- guidance on responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who disclose harm
- guidance on how to build culturally safe environments for children and students
- guidance on their information sharing and recordkeeping obligations, including under the Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards.

### **Diversity and equity – strategies and actions**

At the college, we are committed to ensuring that equity is upheld, and that diverse needs are respected in policy and practice. We aim to ensure that:

- all college staff and volunteers understand the diverse circumstances of children and students
- our college provides support and responds to vulnerable children and students
- children, students, staff, volunteers and the college community have access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand
- the school pays particular attention to the needs of students with disability, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, students who are unable to live at home, international students, and LGBTIQ+ students
- the school pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal students and provides and promotes a culturally safe environment for them.

## Family engagement – strategies and actions

The college ensures that families, carers and other members of the school community are informed about relevant child safety and wellbeing matters and are involved in the promotion of child safety and wellbeing at the school. We aim to ensure that:

- families participate in decisions relating to child safety and wellbeing which affect their child
- we engage and openly communicate with families, carers and other members of the college community about our child safe approach
- all members of the college community have access to information relating to child safety and wellbeing
- families, carers and other members of the college community have the opportunity to provide input into the development and review of the school's child safety and wellbeing policies and practices
- families, carers and other members of the college community are informed about the operations and governance of the college in relation to child safety and wellbeing.

## Risk management

At the 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 annually review our risks and risk management strategies for child safety and wellbeing, evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of our risk controls and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

## Relevant legislation

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.)
  - Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic.)
  - Worker Screening Act 2020 (Vic.)
  - Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic.)
  - Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.)
  - Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic.)
  - Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
  - Public Records Act 1973 (Vic)
  - Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) – Three new criminal offences have been introduced under this Act:
1. **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.
  2. **Failure to protect offence:** This 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.
  3. **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.

| Version | Author                      | Description of Changes | Release Date | Review Date |
|---------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1.0     | Sam di Camillo/Andrew Baker | Policy Creation        | April 2022   | April 2024  |

## ACADEMY COLLEGE POLICY

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|-----|----------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1.1 | Sam di Camillo | Amendment CSS 1 | July 2022 | July 2024 |
| 1.2 | Andrew Baker   | No changes      | July 2024 | July 2026 |